"Freedom and alienation in Graham Greene's "Brighton Rock," Albert Camus' "The Plague," and other related texts."

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BRIEF SUMMARY

This thesis is an exploration of the idea of human freedom, with particular reference to moral or ethical choice, and to what extent man can be alienated from his ability to make significant choices.

I have chosen two novels in which to contextualise these concepts:

Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* is set in England in 1938, and describes what Greene saw as the spiritual shallowness and tawdry materialism of his society at that time. He explores the situation of a young gangster from a deprived background who sets himself against the world around him, comparing the concept of 'good and evil' with the more materialistic idea of 'right and wrong'.

In *The Plague*, Camus has a similar idea of the shallowness of the citizens of Oran in North Africa, who are woken from their indifference to life by an outbreak of Bubonic Plague. The plague may be taken as an analogy of the Nazi invasion of France and the way in which the French people confronted this threat to their freedom.

Both novels are investigated against a background of broadly existential thought, particularly the ideas of Søren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre. Camus' idea of the 'absurd' and Greene's Catholicism will also be seen to be relevant.

Camus came to believe that freedom can only be achieved through a positive 'resistance' to the alienation which threatens out power of choice, and I will argue that the thinking of both writers is consistent with this idea. Also implicit in the work of both Greene and Camus is the notion that freedom can only be achieved by means of a lucid confrontation with the self in the context of a human community, and that the 'outsider' must always remain alienated from the freedom which is possible for those who are fully engaged with such a community.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

To avoid unnecessary confusion, abbreviations have been used only for those texts from which I have most commonly quoted.

Graham Greene:

BR *Brighton Rock*
GFS *A Gun For Sale*

Albert Camus:

PL *The Plague,* Trans. Stuart Gilbert, (1960)
OS *The Outsider*
MOS *The Myth of Sisyphus*
Reb *The Rebel*

INTRODUCTION

Graham Greene and Albert Camus were both active during what is generally regarded as a crucial part of the twentieth century: before during and after the Second World War. Both writers explore the moral landscape which may be seen as the natural territory of the ethical concepts of Freedom and Alienation which I wish to investigate in this thesis.

I have chosen to carry out my exploration of these concepts mainly in the context of two novels: Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*, and Albert Camus' *The Plague*, although I will refer to a variety of other sources so that the ideas found in the texts may be juxtaposed with other relevant concepts. A certain amount of background will also be necessary – philosophical, social, political etc. – in order that a broad perspective of the situation in which the texts were created and reacted to by both contemporary and modern readers and critics may be provided.

Let us begin by looking at some relevant details concerning the novels and their authors.

Greene, Camus and the main texts

Greene was born in England in 1904, the son of the headmaster of Berkhamstead school. Camus was born in North Africa in 1913 into a poor French colonial family; he never met his father, who was killed in the First World War before Camus reached the age of one. Although they may be regarded as contemporaries, their backgrounds may be seen to be sufficiently different to provide us with contrasting viewpoints from which to look at the moral questions which I wish to ask. It is also clear that they were aware of each other's work; we will see that Camus wrote down quotes from

some of Greene's novels in his *Notebooks*, and that Greene annotated the margins of his copy of Camus' *Notebooks*.

Both Greene and Camus attacked what they saw as the complacency of their respective societies: for Greene, the shallow spirituality of England in the period before World War II, and for Camus, the way that so many of the people of France either lay prone under the Nazi occupation or actively collaborated with the German authorities.

The Plague was published in 1947, and has as its subject matter a fictitious epidemic of bubonic plague which infects the North African town of Oran, causing it to be isolated from the world around it. This can be (and often is) read as an analogy of the Nazi occupation of France. There is a sense in which we can regard Camus' novel as representing the inevitable outcome for a society such as that which Greene had portrayed in *Brighton Rock*, which is set in the English seaside town of Brighton in 1938. Greene had returned to England in May of that year after having travelled extensively in Mexico, where he had been gathering material for an account of the 'fiercest persecution of religion anywhere since the reign of Elizabeth'[1] by the revolutionary government of President Calles, and which was to be called *The Lawless Roads*. (Interestingly, while in Mexico he was also adding the finishing touches to *Brighton Rock*). His description of the contrast which he found between the dreary shallowness of England and the vivid and violent life which he had left behind in Mexico is disturbing:

> Mass in Chelsea seemed curiously fictitious; no Peon knelt with his arms out in the attitude of the cross, no woman dragged herself up the aisle on her knees. It would have seemed shocking, like the Agony itself. We do not mortify ourselves. Perhaps we are in need of violence.[2]

Britain was soon to begin preparations for a possible war as a response to the developing situation in Europe, particularly following the 'Anschluss' – Hitler's annexation of Austria on March 11th, 1938 – and the continuing Nazi threat to the Sudeten area of Czechoslovakia. Yet, despite the obviously worsening situation, the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, was regularly in contact with Hitler, trying to appease the Nazis with plans for the surrender of part of Czechoslovakia.* He was still, in September, able to refer to the situation in Czechoslovakia as 'a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing', and that 'it seems ... impossible that [such] a quarrel ... should be the subject of war.'[3]

Greene, it seems , felt otherwise: 'How could a world like this end in anything but war? ... the grit of the London afternoon ... the long waste of the Clapham Road ... Victorian houses falling into decay in their little burial grounds.'[4] Later in the year, he describes how:

> Violence came nearer ... The telephones were cut off, the anti-aircraft guns were set up on the common outside, and the trenches were dug. And then nothing happened at all – the great chance of death was delayed ... poverty and lust called to each other as usual in the wintertime early dark.[5]

It seems that his dark pessimism saw the 'great chance of death' as the only possibility of escape for a country trapped in the aftermath of a depression which had seen its spiritual values decay alongside its Victorian houses. (We will later see, in Chapter 1, how Greene himself saw the 'chance of death' as an escape from the intolerable boredom and depression of his own life through his games of 'Russian Roulette'.) A vision of the shallowness, mediocrity and, perhaps above all,

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* Perhaps the most overt example of Chamberlain's notion of appeasement toward Hitler is his famous 'Peace in our time' speech to the British parliament in September 1938. This was in reference to the Munich Pact: an agreement between the German, British, French and Italian governments to allow the German occupation of The Sudetenland, which formed part of the sovereign territory of Czechoslovakia, despite the fact that no representative of the Czech government was present. (The text of Chamberlain's speech and details of the Munich Pact are available from *The Internet Modern History Sourcebook).*

complacency of Britain just before the war permeates *Brighton Rock* and is reflected in many of its characters; shallow spirituality is represented by Ida Arnold, mediocrity by the unsuccessful gangster, Pinkie Brown, while complacency is implicit in the conservative establishment which is prepared to tolerate the more successful gangster, Colleoni, because he presents an outward show of respectability. As is the case with many of Greene's works, the only real note of hope and integrity is struck by the main female character, Rose, as she remains faithful to Pinkie without illusions as to his capacity for 'evil'. I hope to show that that the alienation of individuals within such a society becomes almost inevitable, and that the consequences of such alienation were as dangerous then as they still are today.

Camus presents us with another example of complacency and mediocrity in his description of the citizens of Oran in the opening of *The Plague.* Just as Greene describes the tawdriness of the 'peep shows' and cheap souvenirs of Brighton, Camus describes Oran in his *Notebooks* as a town:

> ... where shoe shops display ghastly models of tortured feet, where "practical jokes and tricks" lie side by side in shop windows with tricolor wallets ... cafes ... [with] counters scattered with the feet and wings of dead flies, where you are served in chipped glasses.[6]

Surely, it might be said, this is undoubtedly distasteful and banal, but is, after all, harmless; yet neither Camus nor Greene would have agreed. Camus was writing the final parts of *The Plague* just after the war, and he obviously felt that the society which he was describing (that of France just before and during the occupation) simply did not have the resources of imagination necessary to successfully resist a Nazi invasion: a society just like that of Oran, in which we will see that the citizens were concerned only with making their individual existences as trouble free as possible.

Camus' opinion of his compatriots in general may be gauged by an entry in his notebook of 1942:

> The Frenchman has preserved the habit and traditions of revolution. The only thing he lacks is guts: he has become a civil servant, [a] Philistine ... He indulges in plotting with official approval. He reshapes a world without moving from his easy chair.[7]

The reference to the 'civil servant' may be telling, in that many of the civil servants of occupied France had been either forced to co-operate with their Nazi governors or had willingly collaborated with them. But this was also true of many of the officials of the Vichy Government of unoccupied France under Marshal Pétain, which was to become an object of shame for any Frenchman who felt that it was right to resist the Nazis. One aspect of this collaboration involved regarding the British as an enemy, and Camus, writing again in 1942, shows us his own position:

> There are many reasons behind the official hostility toward England (good* or bad, political or not). But nothing is said of the worst motives – fury and the base desire to see the downfall of someone who dares to resist the force that has crushed you.[8]

Just after the war, many unpleasant facts were beginning to emerge about the extent of French collaboration. Julian Jackson, discussing the plight of foreign Jews in France, tells us that 'Without French police co-operation, it would have been difficult for the Germans to arrest the foreign Jews.' Even more disturbing is the claim that, in France between 1940 and 1944, 'About three quarters of all Jews were arrested by the French police.'[9] In *The Plague*, Camus describes how it becomes necessary to isolate those who have come into contact with plague victims for a period of quarantine, and the Municipal Sports Ground is chosen as the most suitable place because 'it was already

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* Perhaps an example of a 'good' reason for French hostility toward England would be the controversial decision to sink a large part the French fleet by the Royal Navy at Mers-el-Kebir, near Oran on July 3rd, 1940. The attack was ordered by Churchill to prevent the ships from falling into the hands of the Germans and being used against Britain, but, 'During the British bombardment more than 1,250 French sailors were killed.' (Gilbert, pp329-30)

surrounded by high concrete walls and all that was needed to make escape practically impossible was to post sentries at the four entrance gates' (PL195). For those who know the history of French collaboration, this is chillingly reminiscent of a real event which took place in another sports ground, the Vélodrome d'Hiver, in 1942:

> An indoor bicycle arena in Paris where more than 13,000 Jews were kept after being rounded up on July 16 and 17, 1942. After being held three days at the Vel d'Hiv, the Jews were transported to Auschwitz. The roundup of the Vel d'Hiv has become a symbol of French collaboration in the deportation and eventual extermination of Jews living in France.[10]

Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, speaking on July 21, 2002 at the annual remembrance service which is held by the French for the victims of Vel'd'Hiv used these words:

> Sixty years ago, here, in Paris, and also throughout France ... The march towards the horror of the Holocaust was speeding up. Already, the shadow of the Shoah was enveloping the innocents herded into the Vélodrome d'Hiver.
> The round-ups of July 1942 were not, alas, the first ... By organizing these systematic round-ups, the French State was sinking more deeply into collaboration and betraying our nation's founding principles.[11]

In *The Plague*, however, Camus does not just present a sort of indictment of the French People, but shows how individuals can, by lucidly examining their own lives, learn to engage meaningfully with their society, resist the evil which they find there and celebrate the goodness present in themselves and those around them. Camus himself did in fact resist the evil represented by the Nazis. Olivier Todd tells us that in 1943 'Camus had made contact with the Combat [resistance] group, and they had put him in touch with the Movement for National Liberation', although he claims to have been "in contact with resistance groups" in Algeria in 1940 and 1941.[12] Camus was involved, along with Jacqueline Bernard and others in the founding of the resistance newspaper, *Combat*, of which he became the editor.[13] He seems to have felt that his writings and editorials, although much appreciated by many in the resistance were a

rather humble contribution; he told his friend René Lalou in 1943 that, although he had joined the Combat group, "I never touched a gun ..." Todd continues: 'Camus said that his "little activity" in the Resistance seemed to him "derisory next to that of some of my comrades who were real combatants"'[14] Perhaps Camus had this situation in mind in *The Plague*, where the character, Joseph Grand, assists the 'sanitation squads' in a clerical capacity, although it is Dr Rieux and Jean Tarrou who are on the front line, as it were, in the fight against the disease.

Yet it is clear that the danger of arrest and torture by the Gestapo or even the French Milice (the collaborationist police force) was only too real for those involved in this 'little activity'. Todd writes: 'To escape this fate and possibly betraying fellow Resistants, the printer who produced *Combat*, André Bollier, committed suicide just as he was about to be arrested by the Germans', while Jacqueline Bourdet, the editorial secretary of *Combat*, was actually arrested and deported to a concentration camp.[15] Camus himself came close to being caught in possession of a 'layout page with the heading of *Combat*'[16] which he managed to slip to a girlfriend just before being searched by the police. In a similar way, Joseph Grand, although not a 'real combatant', faces danger with equanimity in the form of the plague, which he in fact contracts, and from which he almost dies.

Having briefly examined the attitudes which Greene and Camus took toward the condition of the societies in which they lived, and particularly how they regarded the Nazi threat to those societies, I would like to emphasise that this should really be regarded as no more than a background to my main area of enquiry, which I believe would be equally relevant in just about any historical period. To reinforce this idea, it may be interesting to quote Olivier Todd in his introduction to *The Rebel*:

> In the early 1950s, Camus was the most important writer to detect faults behind the Iron Curtain that should be called crimes ... In 1947 *The Plague* could be read mainly as an allegory on the recent Nazi brown plague ... Now it can be also deciphered as an implicit attack on the [Soviet] red plague that had been overlooked.[17]

Moral questions are generally concerned with the situation of individuals within the culture which they happen to have inherited, and the ways in which they can respond or fail to respond to the moral issues of the time, a response which may involve an acceptance or a rejection of received ideas. Greene, for instance, who was brought up in an Anglican culture, made the conscious choice of becoming a Catholic, while Camus who was brought up in a Catholic culture chose to adopt an atheistic position. Greene also came to have distinctly socialist views which were in contrast to those which he held in the earlier part of his life. In 1926, during the General Strike, he was working as a sub-editor for the *Times* newspaper. He refused to join the strike, later claiming that his actions were 'to prevent Churchill's *British Gazette* from being the only official voice to be heard.'[18] This is certainly a valid position, especially in view of Churchill's language in describing the British Workers as 'the enemy' of what Lord Asquith termed 'the innocent mass of the common people.'[19] Yet Greene is not being quite as unambiguous as he seems to suggest here. In *A Sort of Life*, he describes his attitude at that time with, perhaps, more honesty:

> More from curiosity than any wish to support the Establishment I became a special constable and I used to parade of a morning with a genuine policeman ... Our two man patrol always ceased at the south end of Vauxhall Bridge, for beyond lay the enemy streets where groups of strikers stood ... A few years later my sympathies would have lain with them, but the great depression was still some years away: the middle classes had not yet been educated by the hunger-marchers.[20]

Greene, we can see, has travelled a considerable journey from the socially unaware young man of 1926, just in the way that I suggest the main characters of

Camus' novel have travelled toward a greater self-awareness and engagement with those around them. Yet in *Brighton Rock*, the characters, especially Pinkie Brown, seem static, as if trapped within their own illusions, alienated and unable to engage with society. I suggest that both perspectives are vital in order to explore the moral predicament of the individual and its social consequences, which is one of the reasons why I have chosen to juxtapose these two particular texts in this enquiry.

It may be legitimately asked: 'Why does the form of the novel provide a suitable vehicle for the exploration of the concepts of freedom and alienation, which I have described as fundamentally concerned with the idea of morality?' To answer this, I will firstly suggest that the questions themselves, being inherently moral in nature, refer directly to human behaviour in the context of its being either right or wrong, or, perhaps more significantly, good or evil. Martha Nussbaum suggests that the 'moral imagination' which she feels is essential for a human being who seeks to 'live well' in a moral sense, finds a concrete manifestation in the 'creative imagination', especially in the form of the novel: 'The novel is itself a moral achievement ... and can be a paradigm of moral activity'.[21] Of course, she may be overstating the case in the sense that not *all* novels seem suitable to be held up as 'moral achievement[s]', nevertheless, it does seem that the novelist (along with the playwright and poet it must be said) has enormous scope in which to contextualise and explore the human moral predicament. It seems to me that both Greene's and Camus' texts can be regarded as supremely 'moral achievement[s]' in the way that both authors have dealt lucidly with the situation of individuals when confronted with the moral choices presented to them by the world which they inhabit.

Although it may be claimed that the novel is, in itself, a moral achievement, I do not wish to give the impression that I am trying to set Greene and Camus up as moral paradigms; as human beings they must also be seen as imperfect beings. I would even suggest that, without faults and flaws, no artist would be capable of understanding the faults of other humans, and would consequently be incapable of producing art at all. Both Greene and Camus were, for example, philanderers who were less than honest with the women in their lives. I will also suggest, in the chapter entitled 'Colonisation and Oppression', that both were guilty, at least to some degree, of racism, and that Camus in particular could be described as a colonialist. The criticism of Connor Cruise O'Brien will be particularly telling in this respect.

I feel that it is important to firstly explore the two main texts themselves, so that the subsequent examination of the concepts which I will introduce in part two can be achieved with greater clarity. I may, of course, be justly accused of moving from the particular to the general, but I crave indulgence for this slightly unusual strategy, as it does seem to me that the predicament of a particular character must first be clearly understood before the general concept can be seen to be relevant. For example, Iris Murdoch claims that, in *The Plague*, 'Rieux is perhaps the perfect instance of the existentialist hero.'[22] Rather than write an introductory chapter on Existentialism, my preference has been to firstly examine Rieux himself and how he thinks and acts, before considering some of the very basic aspects of Existentialism and deciding whether Murdoch is right or not.

The term Existentialism was actually coined by the philosopher and novelist Jean-Paul Sartre, who was for many years a close friend of Camus until their famous quarrel in 1952. We will look at some of Sartre's ideas and how they bear on the work

of Camus, and also the work of the Danish Philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55) who was a great influence on both Sartre and Camus, and is now, in retrospect, also regarded as an existentialist thinker. A central concept within existentialism is the idea of 'authenticity', which, rather too simply put, means choosing to act in a way which does not depend on any external dogma, but on an 'authentic', which is to say, totally honest, confrontation with the self, an idea which we will examine in the chapter entitled 'Authentic Choices'. Such choices may or may not involve a rejection of religion, but must always be a rejection of unthinking obedience to any sort of dogma, be it religious or secular. We will see the relevance of this idea to many of the characters in *The Plague,* particularly Dr Rieux who seeks nothing outside his own inner idea of 'decency' to justify his moral choices. Also in *Brighton Rock,* the character Rose 'authentically' chooses to remain faithful to Pinkie Brown, a choice which entails a rejection of the morality both of the Catholic Church and of the society in which she lives. Camus was associated with existentialism for many years (although he came to reject the term) whereas Greene is not generally regarded as being an existentialist thinker; nevertheless, I will try to show that much of the thought of both Greene and Camus is consistent with a broadly existentialist viewpoint.

In the chapter, 'A Choice of Good and Evil' we will look at how Greene, in *Brighton Rock*, contrasts the concept of good and evil with that of right and wrong, and the relevance here of some ideas of Søren Kierkegaard and Sigmund Freud. In his book, *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard suggests that, in order to choose good, one must at the same time choose evil or exclude them both, so that the possibility of good is

contingent upon the possibility of evil. Greene clearly shows us that this, of course, has nothing to do with the idea of right and wrong from the perspective of legality.

During the late 30s and early 40s, Camus was deeply concerned with what he described as the 'absurd' nature of life. Put briefly, this is the acceptance that life has no meaning for a human outside his own existence and the existence of those around him. Yet, absurdly, humans cannot help searching for a meaning in a meaningless world. Religion is an illusion, a denial of the absurd and an attempt to find meaning where there is none, betraying the life we live now for some non-existent afterlife. Camus strongly believed, however, that life is still worth living, and that humans can *create* meaning in their own lives, so that the dangers of nihilism and suicide can be avoided. He wrote a trilogy of 'absurd' works during this period: the novel *The Outsider*, the play *Caligula*, and the philosophical essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the last of which had a profound effect on a later movement in literature called the 'Theatre of the Absurd' which included writers such as Eugene Ionèsco, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter. Greene has never himself been associated with the movement, but in the chapter 'Absurd Choices' we will explore how the concept of the absurd is relevant to the literary characters created by both Greene and Camus.

I mentioned earlier that Camus' record with regard to colonialism is not beyond criticism, and we will look more closely at this in the chapter 'Colonisation and Oppression'. We will also examine Marx's claim in *The German Ideology* that the source of the original concept of 'property' is found in the 'family', where the wife and children are the slaves or property of the paterfamilias. In this context, Camus provides us with an interesting and relevant vignette of the family of M Othon in *The Plague*. We will also see that Greene is not himself free of the taint of colonialism,

although, like Camus, he tries to deny this. Oppression may be defined as the denial of the freedom of others. I will argue from an existentialist perspective that the existence of the individual is contingent upon the existence of the 'other', and further, that the freedom of the individual is dependant on the freedom of the other, so that to deny the freedom of anyone - to become an oppressor - is to enslave oneself.

In the concluding chapter, 'Freedom and Resistance', I will draw together the various strands of my exploration by asking the question: what should we do with our freedom in order to fulfil, as far as we possibly can, our potential as moral human beings? Camus' answer is that we should 'resist', and I will look at the concept of resistance (or lack of resistance) to see whether it can provide us with a moral foundation on which we can base such ideas as praise and blame. At the time of writing *The Plague*, he had moved away from the idea of the 'absurd' to the concept of 'rebellion'; moving, as he saw it, from the 'Myth of Sisyphus' to the 'Myth of Prometheus'. Camus had begun a new trilogy of works on Rebellion: the novel *The Plague*, the play *The Just* and the philosophical work *the Rebel* (which was to be the cause of the quarrel between Camus and Sartre to which I referred earlier). For Camus, rebellion is a way of conferring meaning on an otherwise meaningless and 'absurd' existence; but I wish to look at resistance from a slightly different though relevant viewpoint: the idea that any choice which is regarded as truly moral requires both a measure of freedom for the agent (or community) involved, and the resistance by the agent of a force which is trying to curtail that freedom. We also need to ask whether some humans are so alienated from their power of choice that they simply do not have the ability to resist. For example, an individual may be so damaged by abuse suffered in childhood that he becomes alienated from society, unable to understand or

feel part of the world around him, and consequently unable to feel any sense of responsibility for his actions. Does this imply that some humans should be exonerated from blame or responsibility?

How does the idea of freedom stand in relation to the idea of alienation? I will use the term alienation in the sense of a separation of an individual or group of individuals from some form of freedom or autonomy to which they should be entitled, either by law, by ideas of 'natural rights', or, and perhaps more importantly, the idea that each individual has the right to achieve his maximum potential as a human being. In this sense, we might claim that freedom can be defined as the ability to act in such a way as to resist any force which tends to impose a state of alienation. Such forces can be external, as in the case of the persecution of ethnic minorities, or internal, for instance the self-alienation of an individual who seeks to deny his true abilities or responsibilities. We will look briefly at Marx's idea that an individual cannot be free to achieve his potential if he is 'alienated' by the power of the 'free market' from his own ability to live autonomously, and contrast this with the existential idea that man cannot in fact avoid being free, although he may seek to deny this.

Another important concept which could be said to form a backdrop to the whole enquiry, is that of 'choice', especially from the perspective of 'moral choice'. If we perform an action which is worthy of praise or blame, then we must, at some psychological level, have deliberately chosen (morally or immorally) to act as we did; if, on the other hand, the action was unavoidable or inevitable in some way, then it could not have been the subject of choice, and cannot deserve praise or blame. We can see, therefore, that if the concept of choice is to have any real meaning, then there must have been at least one possible alternative to the course of action which is finally

chosen, and that there must have existed the necessary freedom of action to choose either course.

I suggest that, without freely and clearly accepting responsibility for our chosen actions, we cannot hope to achieve our true potential as moral human beings. Unless we have the courage to confront our past decisions, without illusion, and to freely accept any blame which is due to us if we have wilfully acted or failed to act from motives of selfishness, malice or indifference, we remain in a state of alienation, where freedom and resistance can have no grounding. Can any human claim never to have acted badly? The singer, Edith Piaf (who was herself involved in the French resistance*) famously sang: *Non. Rien de Rien/ Non. Je ne regrette Rien.*** Is it really possible to live a moral life which involves 'no regrets'? The theme of the song is to begin life again, to draw a line under the past so that *C'est payé, balayé, oublié;* *** and we will see that this notion occurs in both of our main texts, particularly in *The Plague,* where many of the characters hope to 'start over'. But can this ever be possible without a total confrontation with the past, which must surely, if we are anything less than saints, involve regrets for at least some of our actions? If we reject such a confrontation, will we be, as Kierkegaard suggests, doomed to repeat our mistakes 'over and over again'?

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* While the Germans occupied Paris she was in great demand as an entertainer. Singing for high-ranking Germans at the *One Two Two* Club earned Edith Piaf the right to pose for photos with French prisoners of war, ostensibly as a morale-boosting exercise. Once in possession of their celebrity photos, prisoners were able to cut out their own images and use them in forged papers as part of escape plans. [23]

** *No. Absolutely nothing/ No. I regret nothing.*

*** *It is paid for, swept away, forgotten.*

PART ONE:

AN EXPLORATION OF *BRIGHTON ROCK* AND *THE PLAGUE*

1. *BRIGHTON ROCK*

(During this chapter I will omit the 'BR' abbreviation and simply quote the page no.)

Graham Greene begins *Brighton Rock* from the perspective of an individual consciousness, but almost immediately expands the vision into a panorama of Brighton on a Whitsun holiday. The first line: 'Hale knew, before he had been in Brighton three hours, that they meant to murder him', establishes Fred Hale as a victim, while the second line places him outside the world around him, an alien with 'inky fingers and his bitten nails' of whom 'anybody could tell that he didn't belong' (5). Hale's 'nervous' manner and seedy appearance are contrasted with the 'cool Whitsun wind off the sea,' and the 'fresh and glittering air: the new silver paint [which] sparkled on the piers.' Greene has swiftly and skilfully sketched a scene in which a seemingly unhealthy individual is placed like an exile in a bright, fresh and healthy but yet somehow threatening world. As Graham Smith puts it:

> The novel's opening is justly famous. An extraordinarily successful evocation of Brighton at a Whitsun holiday seen from within the consciousness of the pathetic Hale and thus suffused with a menace that stems from his knowledge that '... they meant to murder him'.[1]

Hale is employed as 'Kolley Kibber',* a representative of the *Messenger* newspaper. His job is to leave cards in various places where they may be found by the public and surrendered for a prize of ten shillings. In addition, anyone challenging him with the correct form of words while holding a copy of the *Messenger* would receive a prize of

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* Interestingly, Colley Cibber, 1671-1757, was an English actor, dramatist and poet Laureate. He was much satirised for his pretentious pomposity; ridiculed by Pope in *The Dunciad* as the character of 'Dullness'. [2]

ten guineas. He has to follow a specified route through the town in which he knows that 'they meant to murder him,' until 'a challenger released him.'

Greene has quickly introduced two important ideas, around which the novel will be constructed: freedom and alienation.

Like a spirit condemned to walk the earth till he is 'released,' Hale pretended that he 'despised the crowd,' while what he really wanted was to be part of it: 'he was condemned by his higher pay to want other things, and all the time the piers, the peepshows pulled at his heart.' Yet even the crowd itself seems to have a sinister character 'as it uncoiled endlessly past him.' The individuals in the crowd are 'bewildered' and innocent, but together they form a serpentine image which seems to accord with the idea of Hale as an exile from the Eden of which he would like to be part; 'He wanted to get back, but all he could do was to carry his sneer along the front, the badge of his loneliness' (6). But he knows too much; he is implicated in the murder of Kite, a racecourse gangster, and this knowledge marks him forever, like Cain, as an exile.

Hale hears a woman's voice singing in a public bar, and goes in. The woman is the 'friendly accommodating' Ida Arnold, who will prove to be one of the main characters in the novel. Hale is impressed with her big, 'well-covered body,' which made you think of 'sucking babes when you looked at her' (7). Greene is here giving us the first glimpse of the woman who will epitomise the shallow and secular earthiness of what he sees as the tawdry world of cheap, sensual pleasure which surrounds us.

We next meet Pinkie Brown, whose character will carry the main thrust of the novel. He is a seventeen year old gangster who has taken over the leadership of the

gang which Kite, the person whom Hale betrayed to a rival gang leader, used to lead. It is Pinkie's gang which is intent on the murder of Hale.

Hale has not realised that Pinkie has come onto the bar until he hears his name called from just behind him. Hale is startled, 'the gin slopped out of Hale's glass onto the bar', and he is obviously afraid of 'the Boy.' He offers Pinkie a drink; but 'the Boy' doesn't drink, and we will later see that he also doesn't smoke, gamble or chase girls. Here is another exile from the world around him, but of a much more sinister and malevolent character than Hale. He detests Ida's singing; 'Christ ... won't anyone stop that buer's* mouth?' and gives way to a 'vicious spurt of hatred – at the song? at the man? – he dropped his glass on the floor. The gentleman'll pay' (8).

The situation becomes absurd: Hale the frightened victim persuades Pinkie to have a 'soft drink', so that he orders a double whiskey for himself and a 'grapefruit squash' for the seventeen year old murderer in the 'shabby smart suit' and with a 'face of starved intensity.' Pinkie watches Hale 'closely and with wonder ... [like a] hunter searching through the jungle for some half-fabulous beast,' while the big-breasted Ida sings drunken, sentimental ballads from the bar, and an 'old commissionaire ... slept over a pint glass of old and mild.' The diminutive Hale -'he was a small man' - looks to the oversized Ida for salvation, 'watching her as if he were gazing at life itself in the public bar.' Perhaps Greene is trying to remind us that murder and evil are not just encountered in the mythical domain of the romantic and melodramatic situations of life, but in the everyday tawdriness of human experience. Hale is imprisoned by the mundane; he is not free to get away because 'he had his job to do' as the ridiculous Kolley Kibber: a comic absurdity that would cost him his life.

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* Buer was used as slang for 'a woman of loose character' (*The Cassel Dictionary of Slang*,J Green ed., Cassel, London, 1998). Perhaps 'slut' would be the more modern equivalent.

It seems to be the fate of Hale to be trapped and enslaved by the commonplace absurdities of life. He temporarily evades Pinkie but is aware that he is alone in the Brighton crowd which 'seemed like a thick forest in which a native could arrange his poisoned ambush' (11). In his desperation, he picks-up a 'fat spotty' girl, hoping that Pinkie will not strike while there is a witness present. But Pinkie finds him and suggests that they all go for a 'sundae' together and Hale is almost lost: 'the instinct not to make a scene remained overpoweringly strong; embarrassment had more force than terror ... it even urged him to go quietly' (15).

Hale does get away this time, however, and meets Ida Arnold further along the sea front. They become friendly, kiss in a taxi, and it seems that Hale has found a life-line in the accommodating Ida; it might even have worked if she hadn't needed to visit the public toilet. But the absurd returns to undermine his efforts; we now have the ridiculous situation of Hale begging her not to go to the lavatory: '"You don't want a wash, Ida," Hale implored her, "You're fine"' (20). But she has to 'go', and so Hale is doomed. When Ida emerges, Hale is gone, kidnapped and soon to be murdered by Pinkie's gang.

Pinkie, in his solitary alienation, is a living example of the apparent rejection of the accepted norms of society, while Ida, with her 'easy' ways, seems to be their very embodiment. Judith Adamson suggests that '[Greene's] characters are caught, like Greene, in the ideological assumptions which grounded his society.'[3] But it seems to be these very assumptions which Greene himself is questioning; assumptions which lead Hale to feel that 'embarrassment had more force than terror.' Yet do we not abandon such ideologies at our peril? As an outsider, Pinkie kills and tortures without any of the feelings of remorse which a 'normal' member of society would be expected

to feel, feelings which might have prevented him from acting in this way. Like the character of Meursault in Camus' *The Outsider*, he seems to have no emotional or moral resources to draw on which can help him. How has 'the Boy' come to be like this? He is certainly responsible for the murders which he will commit, but is there a sense in which he is not to blame for his actual character?

Pinkie, seems to have suffered a degree of psychological damage as a result of his childhood in Paradise Piece, part of Nelson place, a deprived area of Brighton where the houses 'looked as if they had passed through an intense bombardment' (90). His aversion to sex stems from the 'frightening weekly exercise of his parents which he watched [as a child] from his single bed.' Pinkie's alienation from society is made manifest in a dream about his childhood which he experiences later in the novel: it is 'Saturday night. His father panted like a man at the end of a race and his mother made a horrifying sound of pleasurable pain. He was filled with hatred, disgust, loneliness: he was completely abandoned' (186). He not only rejects sex, but most of the normal pleasures of the society around him, so that he does not drink, smoke or bet, adhering to a strange, perverted integrity. When he does eventually take a drink at the Queen of Hearts road house, he 'felt his integrity stained by the taste of the spirit ... You could lose vice as easily as you could lose virtue' (137). Terry Eagleton suggests that:

> Pinkie may be 'evil', but he is not corrupt: his evil is a pure, pristine integrity, a priestly asceticism which refuses the contaminations of ordinary living.[4]

Eagleton seems to be overstating the case a little with the words 'pristine integrity' (we shall examine this idea again later), because it seems that Pinkie does have one real pleasure, which was 'the finest of all sensations, the infliction of pain' (102). He has 'graduated in pain: first the school dividers had been left behind' with which he

had terrorised his fellow pupils, 'next the razor' with which he terrorises the victims of his protection racket (167). He keeps a bottle of vitriol in his pocket, which he sometimes strokes almost sensually, and which he uses to try to frighten his girlfriend and eventual wife, Rose: 'I don't want a friend with her skin burned off' (48), but we shall see that Rose is not so easily intimidated.

Pinkie is also in revolt against the Catholic religion in which he was brought up, but without rejecting what he sees as the truth of its teachings. When he is asked by Rose - another Catholic from the slums of Nelson Place - if he 'believes' he replies, 'Of course it's true ... These atheists, they don't know nothing. Of course there's Hell. Flames and damnation' (52). Adamson claims that:

> Pinkie's problem begins in Nelson Place. More than damnation, he fears the failure, depression, poverty and dullness that come with the place of his birth ... as a Catholic Pinkie is caught: for him to save himself from his inheritance of poverty he must damn himself in the larger Catholic reality.[5]

Although he seems to be deliberately choosing damnation without any attempt at self-deception, he is still holding on to the idea that he might just have time to repent before it becomes too late. We can glimpse this when, for instance, he first takes Rose 'to the country'. He quotes from an old, half remembered rhyme:*

> 'You know what they say - "Between the stirrup and the ground, he something sought and something found".'
> 'Mercy'. [replied Rose]
> 'That's right: mercy'** (91).

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* The rhyme is from William Camden's *Epitaphs*, 1605:
A gentleman falling off his horse brake his neck ... A good friend made this good epitaph ...
My Friend judge not me,/ Thou seest I judge not thee./ Betwixt the stirrup and the ground/ I mercy sought and mercy found.

** Greene seems to be making a rather unwarranted assumption here – that Pinkie and Rose would have had the same sort of education that he himself received. For dramatic purposes, perhaps we have to accept that children from a very deprived, slum area would have been taught 17th century verse.

Somewhere in his distorted psyche, therefore, exists some realisation that he needs mercy. Adamson continues:

> Because Nelson Place is a sociopsychological original sin that compels Pinkie to crime, his success in this world depends on his failure in the next and vice versa. Though there is religious choice, we know that one way or another he is damned...[6]

But Pinkie's view of damnation is tempered by two facts to which Adamson does not seem to give sufficient weight. The first is Pinkie's inability to see things from any other perspective than his own. It is not the case that he *refuses* to do this but that he just *can't*. Greene tells us that 'The imagination hadn't awoken. That was his strength. He couldn't see through other people's eyes, or feel with their nerves' (45). Consequently, 'The word murder conveyed no more to [Pinkie] than the word 'box', 'collar', 'giraffe'. We may be reminded, here, of another of Greene's emotionally crippled characters: Raven in *A Gun for Sale*, which opens with the lines, 'Murder didn't mean much to Raven. It was just a new job' (GFSp5). Interestingly, Greene wrote in 1980 that 'The main character in the novel, Raven the killer, seems to me now a first sketch for Pinkie in *Brighton Rock*. He is a Pinkie who has aged but not grown up.'[7]

Mario Couto suggests that 'For Greene evil is a summation of social wrong and institutional injustice which deprives people like Pinkie of human sensibilities.'[8] The fact is that, for Pinkie, hell and damnation doesn't seem to be much different to the world which he sees around him. His imagination is so underdeveloped that he can't imagine anything other than the sordid existence which he has experienced so far in his short life.

A good illustration of this is found towards the end of the novel. Pinkie decides that, after already having killed two people, he must also kill Rose, even though he

has married her to prevent her testifying against him (which she actually has no intention whatsoever of doing); he sees this as the only way he will ever have 'peace.' He has convinced her to commit suicide as part of a bogus pact between them, and is driving her out to the country where he hopes to see her die by her own hand. He intones to himself, 'Dona nobis pacem.' Rose interrupts, 'He won't ... give us peace.' Rose thinks that they are about to commit a deadly sin which will ensure their perpetual damnation. Pinkie's empirical creed becomes apparent as Greene allows us to hear his thoughts, 'It didn't matter anyway ... he wasn't made for peace, he couldn't believe in it. Heaven was a word: Hell was something he could trust. A brain was only capable of what it could conceive' (228).

The second point follows from the first, in that Pinkie feels that he is in hell already. In this, he seems to take his cue from his degenerate solicitor, Prewitt, whom he had used to arrange his marriage to Rose.

Pinkie pays a visit to Prewitt when he eventually comes under pressure from the investigations of Ida Arnold, as she tenaciously continues her search for the truth behind Hale's death. Spicer, one of the gang members involved in the murder, had become unreliable, so that Pinkie had murdered him to ensure his silence. Prewitt was a witness to this murder, and Pinkie is concerned that Ida will get to him, in order to extract information, so Pinkie wants Prewitt to go on an extended holiday abroad.

We find that Prewitt's life has been a descent from the early promise of a young man who attended 'Lancaster College ... "we had field days with Harrow",' to the crooked brief who was 'a stranger to no wrangle, twist, contradictory clause, ambiguous word,' and who had 'aged in many law courts, with many victories more damaging than defeats' (116/7). He is a ruined man, living in a shabby run down

house, pathetically staring out of his window, lecherously watching 'the little typists go by.' He hates his wife, claiming that 'I married beneath me ... you should see her ... now. My God.' He sums up his life and career: 'Twenty five years. Then this ... the worst that can happen to you [Pinkie] is you'll hang. But I can rot' (209).

Pinkie is horrified by Prewitt's confessions. He is 'nervous and shaken' by the sight of 'a man ... coming alive before his eyes: he could see the nerves set to work in the agonised flesh' (210).

This is not what Pinkie expected, his imagination is shocked by the strange idea that another person can have thoughts and feelings. But the most horrifying idea is that this pathetic man has been imprisoned and ruined by matrimony. 'Twenty five years. and then this...', will this be Pinkie's fate? Based on his own experience, he had always known 'what happened to a man in the end: the stuffy room, the wakeful children, the Saturday night movements from the other bed ... was there no escape anywhere?' (92). It had actually happened to him; he had been trapped by a 'skirt.' Pinkie is able to understand exactly what Prewitt means when he says, 'You know what Mephistopheles said to Faustus when he asked where Hell was? He said, "Why this is hell, nor are we out of it"' (210). Of course Pinkie knew nothing of the literary allusion, but the sense is quite clear, so that he 'watched him with fascination and fear.' What he had always thought was true: there was no need to worry about going to Hell, he was there already.

In the light of this, we may regard his decision to bring about Rose's death as an attempted escape from what Pinkie sees as the sordid Hell of matrimony. When he married Rose, he felt that 'he had gained his temporal safety in return for two immortalities of pain. He had no doubt whatever that this was mortal sin' (169). He

has found no peace, partly because he can't believe in Rose's fidelity, but also because he has committed his sin in full knowledge of its 'mortal' nature.

Pinkie is apparently aware of this on the day of their marriage, and seems determined to ensure that the ceremony is as unpleasant and sordid as possible – 'We don't need any ring ... this isn't a church' (168). After the signing of the register, Pinkie, rather surprisingly, invites Rose along with Prewitt and Dallow for a drink at the Crown public house, 'I'm a drinking man these days ... there's nothing I'm not now.' It's almost closing time, so that they are soon asked rather brusquely to vacate the premises; Pinkie looks at Rose and says rather spitefully, 'Not much of a wedding, she's thinking' (170). The others leave so that Pinkie and Rose find themselves alone together on the pavement outside the pub, and hear 'the door of the 'Crown' closed and locked behind them'. Isolated as man and wife for the first time, 'they felt as if they were shut out from an Eden of ignorance. On this side there was nothing to look forward to but experience' (171). Pinkie has become an exile from the 'Eden of ignorance' where he was safe from the 'bouncing and ploughing', the 'game' which the rest of the world played and which he has always despised. We could say that he has been driven out by the pursuit of Ida Arnold, so that it might be appropriate, before we examine more closely the nature of 'the Boy's' exile, to try to evaluate her character and look at the ways in which it contrasts with those of Pinkie and Rose.

Ida Arnold was 'a sticker.' When the desperate Hale tries to get her to return immediately to London (and safety) with him, Ida refuses with the words, 'I'm out for a bit of fun ... I like to make a real day of it ... I'm a sticker' (18). This, and the fact that she has to go to the lavatory, is effective confirmation of Hale's death sentence. Pinkie's gang have their opportunity, kidnapping and murdering Hale while Ida is

'washing her hands'. She comes out of the lavatory and 'prepared patiently and happily to wait for him to return. She was a sticker.'

Throughout the novel, Ida displays a blind and self-confident optimism which provides an ironic contrast with the reality of the world around her. For Greene, she is, in her own way, just as unable to empathise with the feelings of others as the Boy. She believes that everyone sees things in the same way that she does, so that 'there was no place in the world where she felt a stranger ... There was nothing with which she didn't claim kinship' (72). When Pinkie is pointed out to her, she observes with complete assurance 'A kid like that oughtn't to be mixed up in things ... If he was mine I'd just larrup it out of him.' She is totally blind to the existence of the world in which Pinkie and Rose exist: 'The darkness in which the boy walked ... was alien to her; she had no pity for something she didn't understand.' Greene has set Pinkie and Ida up as enemies who have no hope of ever understanding each other. Where Pinkie has his strange integrity, Ida has no such impediment to her enjoyment of life. She has no time for religion, her spiritual needs being satisfied by her shallow dabblings with the Ouija board or a séance at the 'psychical research headquarters'. 'She believed in ghosts but you couldn't call that thin transparent existence life eternal' (36). Real life, for Ida is the here and now, and is all that really matters: 'Life was sunlight on brass bedposts, Ruby port, the leap of the heart when the outsider you backed passes the post ... Fred's mouth pressed down on hers in a taxi.' She enjoys the physical pleasures which Pinkie disdains: betting, alcohol and sex.

Most of all, however, she feels that she knows 'right and wrong.' The inquest on the death of Fred Hale returned a verdict of death by natural causes, but Ida knows better; it is impossible for her to accept that he would really have left her waiting

outside the public lavatories. She believes that Hale must have been murdered, and this has been 'confirmed' by a session which she has with her planchette, in which she receives the cryptic 'message', 'FRESUICILLEYE'. She interprets this as 'Fred' 'Suicide' and 'an eye for an eye'. The idea that it might have been suicide doesn't in any way alter her sense of outrage on behalf of Fred. It just means that he was driven to it, and that the perpetrators must in any case be caught: 'I'm going to make those people sorry they was ever born' (44). Of course Ida happens to be right about the murder, but what is really a natural and instinctive realisation that something is wrong, is brought down to the level of the absurd and trivial during Ida's supposed contact with the spirit world. She clearly relishes her own shallow and self-satisfied morality: 'I believe in right and wrong', but perhaps it is her own pleasure that she is really pursuing: 'It's going to be exciting, it's going to be fun, it's going to be a bit of life.' In fact, she soon begins to lose a clear memory of Fred Hale's face, so that she confuses his features with those of Charlie Moyne, a desperately poor 'sporting gentleman', to whom she had once given a pound note.

Neil McEwan puts it in this way:

> In her sense of British justice, as well as her cheery hedonism, she is meant to represent English paganism, and so she does. Greene hates it ... The novel alienates Ida from its real world where good and evil conflict, amidst poverty.[9]

This is an interesting idea, inasmuch as we have already seen how Pinkie feels himself to be an exile from the world which Ida inhabits, a world where 'God doesn't mind a bit of human nature' (151), and where sex is 'fun ... it's the game' (165). When it occurs to Pinkie that, after the consummation of their marriage, Rose might be pregnant, he 'watched her with terror and disgust as if he were watching the ugly birth itself, the rivet of another life already pinning him down' (214). There is no 'bit of

fun' that 'does no-one any harm' in Pinkie's world, where sex leads to the loss of freedom and innocence after the 'ugly cry of birth' amid the 'lavatory smells' of Nelson Place.

Couto suggests that 'Ida is concerned with Pinkie as a legal offender, and hence the emphasis [is] on right and wrong.'[10] Perhaps this is where we find the main tension in the novel: what Greene sees as Ida's shallow 'paganism' contrasted with the deeper spirituality of Pinkie and Rose. Yet is Couto really correct in his suggestion that Ida is only concerned with Pinkie as a 'legal offender'? Ida's sense of outrage at Hale's murder seems to be, at least initially, a personal and emotional feeling for a real human being. Even if the pleasure which she gets from 'the hunt' eventually takes her over, she is still aware of Pinkie as a real killer, not just a legal murderer.

In order to better understand the contrast between the two women, a brief explanation of how Rose first becomes involved in the narrative may be helpful at this point. When Hale was murdered, the gang member Spicer continued to leave a trail of his *Messenger* cards in various locations, including 'Snow's', the café where the sixteen year old Rose is a waitress. Pinkie realises that this is dangerous, and tries to retrieve the card, but is spotted by Rose. She tells him that she remembers the face of the person who left the card, and that it certainly was not like the photograph of 'Kolley Kibber' (Fred Hale), which she has seen in the *Messenger,* so that Pinkie realises that she is a potentially dangerous witness who could hang him. He reluctantly begins to court Rose, and eventually feels compelled to get the decrepit Prewitt to arrange a wedding between him and the girl, so that, as her husband, she cannot be made to testify against him.

As we have seen, Rose and Pinkie are both Roman Catholics and both have been brought up in the slums of Nelson Place. As such, they inhabit a world of knowledge and experience, including the knowledge of good and evil, from which Ida, it seems, is excluded. Rose says of her, 'Right and wrong. That's what she talks about ... as if she knew ... oh she won't burn. She couldn't burn if she tried' (113). Ida sees it as part of her mission to save Rose from the 'evil' Pinkie, and tries several times to get her to leave him. At one point, Ida 'corners' Rose in her bedroom at Snow's and attempts to persuade her to leave the Boy. The terms she uses are typical of Ida's mix of down-to-earth common sense and shallow superstition:

> I'm your friend. I only want to save you from that boy ... He's wicked ... He doesn't care for you ... There's not one who's worth it ... I've done a thing or two in my time – that's *natural.* Why ... it's in my hand: the girdle of Venus. But I've always been on the side of right... You're young. You'll have plenty of boys before you're finished (122).

Ida simply does not have the imagination to understand that there can be any other way of looking at the situation. Her platitudes have only an illusion of coherence, and they completely misses the mark with Rose:

> The Nelson Place eyes stared back at her without understanding. Driven to her hole the small animal peered out at the bright and breezy world; in the hole were murder, copulation, extreme poverty, fidelity and the love and fear of God (123).

Couto sums up the situation in this way:

> Rose hoped to escape the drudgeries of her life through her marriage to Pinkie. Her trust is complete and does not waver when she comes to realise that he is a fugitive from justice. All earthly logic and human philosophy should have prompted her to leave him but there is a deeper call that binds her to him: a loyalty and compassion, and a sense that even though he is apparently depraved there is a spirit in him to which she responds and which transcends the common-sense, material world whose safety Ida offers her. [11]

Is Couto perhaps overstating the case a little here? Rose certainly displays loyalty and compassion, but isn't what Couto describes as the 'spirit in him... which transcends

the common sense world' really just an illusion on her part? Although we will see that Pinkie does feel a faint 'tenderness' for the girl after the consummation of their marriage, she ultimately means no more to him than the others who have got in his way and had to be disposed of.

For Ida, however, the main problem here seems to be one of communication: she is using the language of a stranger in a strange land who cannot make herself understood. When Ida uses the phrase 'I'm a sticker', she sees herself as a loyal friend to some of the men she has met or had affairs with, but to Rose this has no meaning at all – except, perhaps, that Ida is a threat that refuses to go away. But what does Ida really mean here? Like so many apparently dominant and forceful women, Ida seems to favour the weak man, the underdog, perhaps because they pose no threat to her 'dandy' life. She has an affair with the inadequate Phil Corkery, she gives money to the pathetic cadger, Charlie Moyne, she remembers with affection an affair she had with a man who told her he was dying in order to get her sympathy, 'hello you old ghost' is how she now greets him at Henneky's bar. Her ex-husband, Tom, is writing her passionate letters and trying to resurrect their relationship, but Ida seems to value her freedom too much to want to be faithful to one man. She tells the various men she meets about the letters, treating them as a sort of proof that men find her irresistible. Then she meets the nervous, 'nail-bitten' Fred Hale; she recognises a perfect victim for her big-breasted 'merciless compassion'.

Ida's 'compassion' is, therefore, basically selfish in nature, perhaps because it is the only thing that she can find to fill her otherwise empty life. The affairs with various men have not really brought her any pleasure; when she wakes next to Phil Corkery in the bedroom of the Cosmopolitan, she reflects on the inadequate night of

fornication: 'Fun ... human nature ... does no one any harm ... the old excuses came back into the alert, sad and dissatisfied brain ... men always failed you when it came to the act' (151). So she turns her 'dissatisfied' mind to the murder of Fred Hale (whose face, as we have seen, has begun to fade in her memory) and the self gratification she is going to get out of hunting down those responsible: 'She sat up in bed ... and felt excitement stirring in the disappointed body. Poor old Fred ... She couldn't remember anything about him now. The hunt was what mattered.' Perhaps this will make up for the inadequacies of Phil Corkery, who is lying next to her, apprehensive and 'yellow with the sexual effort'.

She is trying to justify her casual sex by saying that 'no one could call her really bad', and by the fact that 'it wasn't as if she got anything out of it'. She is trying to have it both ways: sensual pleasure which she knows is immoral by the standards of the society in which she lives, and yet a sense of virtue, a kinship with that very society. She can only achieve this by showing that there are others who are the real evildoers. She 'does no one any harm', and intends to make sure that 'the evil [ones] suffered'. The true nature of her 'compassion' becomes clear when Greene tells us that 'she was prepared to cause any amount of unhappiness to anyone in order to defend the only things she believed in' (36).

If we compare this to the faithfulness which Rose shows toward Pinkie, we see that words like 'faith', 'compassion', 'love' mean totally different things to the woman and the girl. When Ida confronts Pinkie and Rose at Snow's, she tells Pinkie to 'Leave her alone ... I know all about you.' She wants to 'rescue' Rose whether she wants to be rescued or not; she 'knows what's right'. But she is talking a different language.

Greene allows us a glimpse of how he feels about part of his contemporary society when he tells us that:

> It was as if [Ida] was in a strange country: the typical Englishwoman abroad. She hadn't even got a phrase book. She was as far from [Pinkie and Rose] as she was from Hell – or Heaven. Good or evil lived in the same country, spoke the same languages, came together like old friends ... "You want to do what's Right, Rose?" she implored (127).

From a similar perspective, Eagleton describes Ida's words as 'a vulgar and irrelevant voice in the absolutist country into which she blunders.' [12]

Ida does not have the 'phrasebook' which will allow her to understand the vocabulary of good and evil. It is only with her own subjective ideas of right and wrong that she can engage, so that Ida's compassion is really based on her own gratification. It would be impossible for her to hold sympathetic feelings for anyone who did not fit in with *her* ideas, because *their* ideas would be expressed in a language which she simply would not be able to comprehend.

However, as we have seen earlier, it is very different in the case of Rose; she feels loyalty and compassion towards Pinkie, quite irrespective of what he has done. After their marriage, Pinkie and Rose move into Pinkie's old room at Frank's, a cheap boarding house which is also the gang's headquarters. Ida gets in to see Rose while Pinkie is out, by pretending to be Rose's mother come to visit her daughter; once again she has Rose 'cornered' in a bedroom, and once again she uses her language of 'common sense' clothed in her 'merciless' yet self-seeking compassion: 'Now let's talk sensible, dear. I'm here for your own good. You got to be saved. Why ... your life's in danger' (197). Ida is totally unable to understand Rose's reply, 'You go away if that's all – "All," the woman was shocked. "what do you mean all?"' For Ida, of course, life *is* all. She cannot comprehend that there is any further dimension to the

human experience than can be found in the sensible and mundane country which she inhabits, where the 'glass of Guinness on a sunny day' marks the depth of human fulfilment. Ida next plays what she feels is her trump card; she whispers softly to Rose, 'He's a murderer.' Once again Rose deflates Ida with the words, 'Do you think I don't know *that*?'

It is clear that Rose is loyal to what she believes to be the *real* Pinkie, for better or worse, without any conscious self-deception, even though Pinkie is, of course, hiding his true feelings from her. When Pinkie later takes Rose out into the country to fulfil his bogus suicide pact, Rose is fully aware that what they are about to do is regarded by Catholics as 'the worst act of all ... the sin without forgiveness ... the mortal sin' (228), but this doesn't stop her, even though she has no desire to commit suicide herself. She shows the depth of her courage and faithfulness when she decides that 'she was going to show them that they couldn't damn him without damning her too. ... she wouldn't let him go into that darkness alone' (228). But who is the 'they' to whom Rose is referring? It includes Ida, certainly, but also, perhaps, all the self-righteous members of a society which turns its eyes away from the despair and alienation of those brought up in the Nelson Places of the world, while allowing corruption to flourish in the centres of power. The gangster Colleoni, for example, is successfully taking over the race-course protection rackets in the Brighton area, and lives in high style at the Cosmopolitan Hotel. Crab, who used to be in Kite's gang but now works for Colleoni, describes his new boss to Cubitt, another disillusioned member of Pinkie's gang:

> ... he'll go in for politics one day. The conservatives think a lot of him ... He likes things done properly. No violence. The police have great confidence in Mr Colleoni (158/9).

Greene wants us to see that Rose is deliberately siding with Pinkie against a world where wicked or ignorant people prosper, while others are condemned for committing the same crimes, but on a lesser scale. When Pinkie is taken to the police station after his meeting with Colleoni, it is made plain that they know about his vicious assault on the bookie, Brewer. But this is not what the inspector is really concerned about. What he says to Pinkie seems to represent a cynically utilitarian warning from society itself:

> I don't mind you [the mobs] carving each other in a quiet way, I don't give a penny for your worthless skins, but when two mobs start scrapping people who matter may get hurt ... decent innocent people ... You can't stand against Colleoni ... it will be Colleoni who has all the alibis. No one's going to fake you an alibi against Colleoni (67).

It is made clear that Pinkie is not one of the 'people who matter'. But he is separated not only from 'decent innocent people', perhaps like Ida Arnold, Phil Corkery and the rest, but also from the likes of the criminal Colleoni against whom he can't compete. Paradoxically, it is Colleoni's very success as criminal which allows him to be tolerated by a society against which he is committing crimes on a far greater scale than 'the Boy', so that this society actually becomes an accomplice to crimes against itself. Also, Colleoni's crimes are similar to those of Pinkie, but performed more efficiently, so that Pinkie is alienated from the society in which he lives on the basis of his inefficiency as a criminal. Rose, of course, deliberately chooses to join him in his alienation.

The police inspector's attitude seems to be typically utilitarian, perhaps humanist in its practical concern for the 'decent' people, whereas Rose does not seem to be concerned with any of this. Her loyalty is to Pinkie, in defiance of the values of society. Eagleton suggests that:

> Greene's characters are able to retain a sceptical detachment from human values ... which lends them superiority, in the final analysis, to the rationalist or liberal humanist ... they can reveal qualities of compassion which are again superior to

> the humanist's ethic by virtue of the disillusion and damnation – and so lack of self-deception – in which they are rooted. [13]

Can we, however, really accept this 'final analysis'? We have seen how it is Pinkie's alienation from what Judith Adamson describes as 'the ideological assumptions which grounded his society' (see above p15) that allows him to torture and kill his victims. Surely, Rose's loyalty to such a criminal is something rather more sinister than a 'sceptical detachment from human values'; is it not simply complicity in his crimes? Her 'qualities of compassion' do not seem to extend to the Pinkie's victims; in fact, they both seem to lack the moral and ethical resources which society seems to need in its citizens in order to function as a moral entity.

Perhaps it is within this 'superior' compassion that we find the reason why Rose remains deaf to Ida's 'common-sense' style of pseudo rationalism, while continuing to maintain what she saw as her own standards of faithfulness and loyalty. Ida typifies a certain approach to morality which was not only prevalent in Greene's society, but also seems to be alive and well as we move into the twenty first century, that of the moral relativist: there are no absolutes or categorical imperatives, a 'bit of human nature' is alright just so long as you don't 'go too far' and 'know what's right' even though what you actually do may be seen as wrong. Couto quotes Angus Wilson, who is commenting on the degree of realism which Greene achieved with his characterisation of Ida and her contemporaries:

> It was 1938. A time when we needed painful truths ... needed to realise, and more important to feel, something deeper than just right and wrong ... The world of that big – both hearted and breasted – decent, sensible, no-nonsense woman, Ida Arnold, was not going to be enough ... a moment of truth all the stronger because Ida was so real. [14]

In hindsight, we might say that Greene seems to be displaying a degree of prescience. The Nazi state had come into existence in Germany by means of a cynical

manipulation of the political climate there, and was completely legal as far as the laws of Germany were concerned. We must assume, therefore, that if Ida (and also, perhaps, the police inspector) had lived in Germany at that time, they might have been lining up with their fellow 'decent' citizens to salute the 'rightful' government. When Ida goes to Fred Hale's cremation, she notices, on leaving, that 'from the twin towers above her head fumed the very last of Fred, a thin plume of grey smoke from the ovens'. Greene juxtaposes death with the middle class life going on around it: 'People passing up the flowery suburban road looked up and noted the smoke; it had been a busy day at the furnaces' (36). The world was only one year away from the horrors of the second World War, in which many of the values of civilised humanity would disappear like smoke from a chimney along with the bodies of millions of 'decent innocent people'; Greene seems to be implicitly suggesting that the humanism of the police inspector and the shallow compassion of Ida Arnold will prove to be an inadequate protection against the approaching barbarism. (Again, I will say that this seems to be so in hindsight. I do not claim that Greene's apparent prescience was a genuine ability on his part to foretell the horrors to come). On his return from Mexico in 1939, meditating on such spiritual shallowness and the superficiality of the life going on around, Greene was to write: '... a Watney's poster, a crime of violence, captain Coe's Finals. How could a world like this end in anything but war?'[15]

Greene seems to be striving for a degree of realism in drawing for us a sketch of what he must have felt was the banality of life in England at the time. Yet we have seen how Greene's realism is not always consistent in the novel. An interesting slant on this may be found in the 1947 Boulting Brothers film version of *Brighton Rock*, where Greene shared the writing credits with Terrance Rattigan. Rose is played by

Carol Marsh, whose 'received pronunciation' accent and wide-eyed innocence jars with any viewer who is familiar with the harsh reality of deprived areas such as Rose is supposed to come from. Yet, we may wonder, if Greene was involved with the film so closely, is this how he imagined the Rose of the novel? Despite his descriptions of the 'toilet smells' of Nelson Place, has he slipped into thinking of her as some sort of well brought up and well spoken young lady? For Graham Smith realism is not a major issue with this particular text. He suggests that 'The vivid realism and rapid action of earlier Greene could hardly have accommodated the confrontation between heaven and hell that hovers so insistently over *Brighton Rock.*'[16] Smith continues:

> Pinkie and Rose and the rest are impressed on our imagination not because of ... [Greene's] ability to reproduce the cadences of Brighton slang, but because they inhabit the kind of novel where questions of realism are frequently inapplicable.'[17]

Whether we can accept this idea or not, perhaps we can allow Greene some licence in this area, provided that his lack of realism does not become a lack of reality. He had seen reality in Mexico and in London, and tried to address the reality of a confrontation between good and evil in Brighton. We could certainly wish for greater consistency in details of dialogue and characterisation, but perhaps the crumbs from Spicer's sausage rolls which Pinkie continually finds on his bed (see BR p84) are enough to ground us in his banal world of sordid evil.

Pinkie is enclosed, geographically as well as spiritually, within a small world which is his 'inheritance' from Kite, the murdered former gang boss, whom Pinkie seems to have thought of as a surrogate father, and the only person in the world for whom he felt anything like respect and affection.

> This was [the Boy's] territory, the populous foreshore, a few thousand acres of houses, a narrow peninsula of electrified track running to London, two or three stations with their buffets and buns. It had been Kite's territory ... and when Kite

> died ... it had been as if a father had died, leaving him an inheritance which it was his duty never to leave for strange acres (130).

This is the territory of Pinkie's exile; around him is the larger 'Eden of ignorance' from which he is forever excluded, partly by what he sees as his knowledge of what it means to be damned, but also by what we see as his inability to imagine life from any other point of view than his own. After the inquest on Spicer (another example of the inadequacies of the idea of legality – both Hale and Spicer are 'legally' dead of natural causes, although they were both murdered by Pinkie), the Boy meditates on his situation: 'He stared out towards France, an unknown land. At his back beyond the Cosmopolitan ... stood the downs, villages, cattle round the dewponds, another unknown land' (130). The Cosmopolitan itself represents the territory of Colleoni and the affluent establishment from which he is excluded simply because of his cheap suit and lack of sophistication.

Only Rose can share this exile with him, but this does not mean that he feels in any way satisfied with her as his 'sweetheart' who has brought back to him memories of his childhood home in Nelson Place, from which he 'thought he had made his escape' (90). Greene shows us that the contrast between her and the females who inhabit the capitalist world in which Colleoni luxuriates is extreme. When Pinkie goes to meet the successful gang boss at the Cosmopolitan, he sees the 'small tinted creatures, who rang like expensive glass when they were touched but who conveyed an impression of being as hard and tough as tin' (61). Pinkie does not create a favourable impression on them: 'A little bitch* sniffed at him and then talked him over with another little bitch on a settee', but when the grey haired Colleoni walks

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* In the first version of *Brighton Rock* Greene refers to the predatory females of the Cosmopolitan as 'Jewesses'. It is rather disturbing that he saw fit to replace this in later versions with the term 'bitches'.

past 'across the acre of deep carpet' with his 'grey double breasted waistcoat' and 'glacé shoes', he creates much more interest: 'The little bitches on the settee stopped talking as he passed and concentrated.' Even the waitresses at Snow's turn their back on 'the Boy' when he demands service; he thinks how 'they'll see – one day ... they'll learn', but in the meantime, the best that he can do is Rose, 'in a shabby black straw [hat] which made her face look as it would look in twenty years time, after the work and the childbearing' (86). When Pinkie takes her, by bus, 'out in the country', he seems to suddenly become bitterly aware of the shortcomings of his 'sweetheart':

> 'when he looked at the girl who admired him, the poison oozed out ... "Take off that hat. You look awful." She obeyed him: her mousy hair lay flat on the small scalp: he watched her with distaste. This was what they joked about him marrying: that' (88).

Yet she is his only ally, the only person who will accept him as he is, and consent to share his lonely exile. Pinkie seems to understand this at some level, and comes to the realisation that he actually needs her in his life. When he interrupts Ida's interrogation of Rose in her bedroom at Snow's, he suddenly sees that 'she was something which completed him ... What was most evil in him needed her: it couldn't get along without goodness' (126). Good and evil, therefore, can live together in a territory which is alien to the ideas of right and wrong. Rose herself is 'a stranger in the country of mortal sin' (189). But, unlike the Boy, it is her deliberate decision to inhabit this world. As a Catholic, she believed that her marriage to Pinkie in a civil ceremony was not a marriage at all. When she wakes after their first night in bed together, she realises that 'she had chosen her side; if they damned him they'd got to damn her too (189).' Yet by damning herself along with Pinkie, she had achieved a strange sort of freedom, 'freedom from the silent prayers at the altar, from the awful demands made on you at the sanctuary rail' (194). 'In the outside world it was

Sunday', but Sunday no longer had any relevance for Rose in her 'country of mortal sin.'

Pinkie is shown to be evil, a sadistic murderer who is only concerned with his own dreams of success as a gang leader. He is totally unable to sympathise or empathise with any other human being except for the murdered Kite, who had taken the Boy in off the streets when he was destitute. As we have already discussed, Greene wants us to see that 'the Boy's' imagination has been ruined by his dreadful childhood in Nelson Place.

But this picture is not complete. If the boy really was no more than an emotional cripple for whom there was no possibility of awakening to any sort of human sensibility, then the novel would merely be a description of cause and effect: the actions of a sort of defective machine. There is a real tragedy, however, which lies in the fact that Pinkie is far more 'human' than is at first apparent, and there are moments when he comes close to experiencing some sort of rudimentary feelings for Rose. In the morning after he has consummated his marriage, for example, after 'he had graduated in the last human shame ... a faint feeling of tenderness woke for his partner in the act' (181). Again, towards the end of the novel, when Rose has agreed to the bogus suicide pact, 'he had a sense that somewhere, like a beggar outside a shuttered house, tenderness stirred, but he was bound in a habit of hate... [yet]he felt the prowling presence of pity' (231). We get a sense that something is missing from his life, something of which he is aware and for which he yearns at some sub-conscious level. He is not free in the sense that Rose is free, because he just can't understand what it is that life has deprived him of, and so cannot even begin to do anything positive about his 'yearnings.'

The tragedy of this is made clear when, just after he marries Rose, they go to a matinee performance at a cinema; he is really just putting off the moment when he will be alone with her, and have to perform the act which he dreads so deeply. He watches as 'The two main characters made their stately progress toward the bed-sheets', and reacts tellingly: 'He whispered suddenly, furiously to Rose, 'Like Cats.' It was the commonest game under the sun – why be scared at what the dogs did in the streets' (179). Pinkie's apparently cold and evil personality is suddenly contrasted with his stunted but nevertheless extant human capacities: 'suddenly, inexplicably the boy began to weep' at the sight of the 'limitless freedom' of the film characters – the freedom to experience love and enjoy sexuality in a place which is 'hopelessly out of reach' to the boy, where there is 'no fear, no hatred, no envy.'

We glimpse the confusion and horror of a mind which is capable of knowing not only that there is, somewhere, a place of peace, love and freedom, but also that it is a place from which it is forever exiled.

Throughout the novel, the sea forms an ever-present background, a motif which punctuates the text in a way which often seems ominous or threatening. It is a technique which Greene uses with subtlety and which allows him to infuse various of the scenes with a specific ambience, as if the sea is an actual character in the text somehow possessed of a deeper awareness than the merely human actors in the drama. When, for instance, Hale is desperately trying to 'chat up' a girl as a protection from Pinkie's gang, he becomes aware of the 'remote and neglected sea coiling round the piles of the West Pier' (13). We have already seen that Hale feels separated from the holiday crowd as it 'uncoiled endlessly past him' (see p1 above), and here the

serpent-like image recurs, this time as the sea seems to writhe around the pier on which he sits, along with the idea of separation from something 'remote' and 'neglected.'

Just after the murder of Hale, Pinkie tries to establish an alibi by winning a prize at a shooting-booth and asking the proprietor the time. He wins a doll which reminds him of the Virgin Mary, and which he dangles callously from his hand, 'holding the Mother of god by the hair.' As if disturbed by this 'blasphemy', the sea 'washed round the piles at the end of the pier, dark poison-bottle green' (22). Later, after Pinkie's vicious attack on the bookie, Brewer, he is walking home with his accomplice, Dallow. Suddenly, the sea, which can never be far away, is with them as 'a movement, a splashing, a darkness' (59).

Pinkie's 'territory' is bounded by the sea on one side, a sea which seems almost sentient in its displeasure at the Boy's sadistic violence, and also in the way in which it seems at times to represent the world from which he and Hale are excluded. When Cubitt leaves Pinkie, intending to betray him to Colleoni, the sea is 'a sliding and a sibilation' which seems to hiss its disapproval at the treachery of which man is capable. Cubitt hears a violin played from somewhere out in the darkness of the ocean, and it seems like a 'sea beast mourning and stretching towards the shore' (154), perhaps reaching towards the remnants of humanity in Cubitt, warning him that his very soul is in danger.

But suddenly Greene gives us a rather different perspective. Cubitt begins to see the mist blowing in off the sea as 'ectoplasm.' He thinks of Spicer, his murdered fellow gang member, and then of a séance which he once attended. Greene plunges us into the absurdity of Cubitt's dead mother trying to reach him 'from the seventh plane

where all was very beautiful: her voice had sounded a little boozed, but that wasn't really un-natural' (154/5), We are brought crashing down from the metaphysical or poetic heights of an all-seeing ocean to the crass level of Ida Arnold's Ouija board and bar-room voice.

Of course, Ida Arnold is the Nemesis bearing down on Pinkie, with her 'dangerous' and 'remorseless' optimism, and her certainty of what is right and wrong, and perhaps it is sometimes Greene's intention that we identify her with the sea. As we have already seen, Ida believes she has been 'told' that Fred Hale was either murdered or forced to commit suicide, during a session with the planchette in which letters were supernaturally spelled out (See above p27). She then chose to 'interpret' them in such a way that her suspicions about Fred's death were confirmed. Two of the letters don't fit in, but that is not a problem for Ida; 'I don't know [their meaning] yet but I'll bear them in mind' (44). When, later, she is at the Cosmopolitan hotel, disappointed after a dismal session of failed fornication with Phil Corkery, the idea of a supernatural communication seems to be echoed in the surf along the shoreline. She turns her 'dissatisfied mind' towards the hunt for Fred's murderers and looks out at the sea:

> It was almost dark along the beach; the edge of the sea was like a line of writing in whitewash: big sprawling letters. They meant nothing at this distance (152).

Ida must somehow hide from herself the physical and emotional frustration which is the result of her shallow, sensual life, and her mystic hunt for justice is just what she needs to mask her inadequacies. As she stretches her arms sensually, she isn't bothered about the letters in the surf not meaning anything 'at this distance', she'll simply 'keep them in mind' till later, when she can bend them into a meaning which will suit her 'mission'.

Greene tells us that 'there was something dangerous and remorseless in [Ida's] optimism' (36), and we glimpse this when later, still at the Cosmopolitan, she is telling Phil Corkery how she intends to 'save' Rose from Pinkie. Phil weakly asks her 'How do you know she doesn't *want* to be left?' But Ida is not having any of this sort of nonsense. She dismisses any idea that Rose could possibly have any valid reason for staying with Pinkie: 'Nobody wants that ... I don't give up until she's safe. Get me another Guinness' (223). The scene ends with the juxtaposition of the sea once more, which seems to echo Ida's pugnacious 'compassion': 'The tide rolled regularly in ... You could hear it pounding at the piles, like a boxer's fist against a punchball in training for the human jaw, and softly and just a little tipsily Ida Arnold began to recall the people she had saved...' (223).

The sea forms an ominous climax to one of the clearest insights which Greene gives us into Pinkie's psychology, in the form of a dream which he has just after his marriage to Rose: he is a child in a school playground 'sick with fear' as 'they came towards him with a purpose.' Kite puts a razor in his hand, and 'He knew then what to do ... that there were no rules' (186). We see the vulnerable child threatened by the ominous 'they', and that no 'rules' or ideas of legality or right and wrong can save him, only the razor that Kite puts into his hand can do this. He is pitted against an uncaring world from which he is totally alienated. As the dream continues:

> He was upon the pier and he could see the piles breaking – a black cloud came racing across the channel and the sea rose: the whole pier lurched and settled lower. He tried to scream: no death was so bad as drowning (186).

Ida Arnold's 'dangerous' and 'remorseless' optimism seems present in the image of the threatening sea, which can even destroy such a solid landmark as the pier, which, of course, was the scene of Pinkie's murder of Hale. Pinkie, we might say, is

frightened, terrified of drowning in her false and pitiless compassion; her carnality, also, is distastefully present as he slips down the steep angle of the pier, 'down and down into his bed in Nelson Place', to find himself 'abandoned' in the bedroom which he shared with his parents, 'like a soul in purgatory, watching the shameless act of a beloved person.'

Can we perhaps detect, in Pinkie's dream, an echo of the dream of the Duke of Clarence in Shakespeare's *Richard the Third*? Clarence has a terrifying dream of drowning, which seems to presage his own all too real death which will shortly follow. Nemesis for Pinkie takes the form of Ida, while, for Clarence, she puts on the appearance of Richard, Duke of Gloucester. Both dreams take place in the English channel, with their homeland out of reach, and in both Nemesis seems to stretch out her hand to drag the dreamer down into the avenging sea. For Pinkie, as we have seen, 'no death was so bad as drowning', while for Clarence the horror is no less as he is 'Struck' by Gloucester '... overboard/ Into the tumbling billows of the main./ O Lord! Methought what pain it was to drown.'[18]

It seems that Pinkie unconsciously feels himself to be irrevocably damned, with no way to get himself off the road to perdition. Just as Clarence's murder of his 'sovereign's son'[19] seems to bring about retribution at the hands of Gloucester's killers, Pinkie's own evil acts lead him on inevitably to his death and annihilation, when he is 'withdrawn suddenly by a hand out of any existence – past or present, whipped away into zero – nothing' (242). Adamson quotes T S Eliot:

> '[if] the glory of man is his salvation, it is also true that his glory is his capacity for damnation. The worst that can be said of most malefactors or thieves, is that they are not men enough to be damned.'[20]

We are reminded of Rose's remark concerning Ida: 'She couldn't burn if she tried.'

So Pinkie eventually disappears into 'nothing'; Greene's comments on another fallen catholic* seem appropriate here: '[his] last footprints seem to point unmistakably to the inferno'.[21] The likes of Colleoni and Ida are meanwhile left to continue their existence in a seemingly uncaring world. Colleoni remains in his position of power, well thought of by the 'conservatives', while Ida has yet another Guinness at 'Henneky's', and yet another session with 'the Board', this time to ask its advice on whether she should go back to her ex-husband. We sense the unremitting uselessness, the hidden frustration in her constant search for shallow satisfaction, which, we may feel, Greene wants to suggest is the general condition of his society at that time.

Looking back at the year of 1938 in the knowledge of the horror to come, Greene seems almost to have felt that society was bringing evil down on itself; and not, paradoxically, because of its Pinkies, but because the foolish mysticism of Ida Arnold represented the limits of its spirituality.

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* Greene is referring to Frederick Rolfe, the 'failed priest' who ended his life as a penniless paedophile.

2. *THE PLAGUE*

Preliminaries - a short introduction to Oran and its citizens.

(During this chapter I will omit the 'PL' abbreviation and simply quote the page no.)

While planning *The Plague* in 1944, Camus wrote in his notebook that he wished to 'make the theme of separation the big theme of the novel.'[1] This idea can be seen to be present in the very first pages of the text, where he immediately establishes a setting in which Oran is shown as being different in three particular ways 'from other business centres in other parts of the world' (5): by its ordinariness and drab banality; its geographical isolation and its separation from and disregard of the cycle of nature. Let us briefly examine each in turn.

Oran is 'ordinary', but not in the sense of being like every other ordinary place: Camus wants us to see that its citizens are especially complacent in the way that they live their lives, particularly in the way that they have not confronted death. Those who are 'unfortunate enough' to become ill, lie unregarded by the rest of the population who are either 'sitting in cafes or hanging on the telephone' discussing business (7). People die 'behind hundreds of walls', either alone or visited only by those nearest to them (6/7). 'Oran is a town without intimations' (6) of there being other dimensions to life except those of 'doing business', and a rather ritualised pleasure seeking which is 'sensibly' kept for the week-ends: 'you can get through the days without trouble once you have formed habits' (7). 'Everyone is bored' (5), and concerned only with making their daily routine as simple and undemanding as possible. Implicit here is the idea that they are not fully 'alive': the idea of getting 'through the days without trouble' suggests a state of existence which seeks to avoid a full engagement with reality; an

existence in which the troublesome realities of both life and death are so muted by 'habits' that they are, as far as is possible, kept from intruding into the consciousness of the citizens.

Paradoxically, the ordinariness of Oran, even though it is the cause of its being 'different from other business centres',* can nevertheless be taken as a metaphor for French society in general at that time. From this point of view, it might be interesting to look at Camus' description of the inhabitants of Lyons in a letter to Jeanne Sicard in 1936: 'a city of hypocrites and suppressed people, whom I detest with all my heart because they do everything possible to avoid life. They park themselves behind dishes of quenelles and fillet of sole cooked in cream. They are typical Frenchmen in their flat mediocrity...'[2]

Perhaps we might paraphrase Socrates in saying that the people of Oran/Lyons/France are living 'unexamined lives, which are therefore not worth living.'

The Plague, however, is extra-ordinary; it must inevitably force the citizens of any society which it attacks into a confrontation with death and their own personal mortality. Humans tend to find it hard to believe that death in the form of something as 'unreal' or exotic as bubonic plague can come to 'ordinary' people; consequently they often try desperately to hang on to this ordinariness as if it is some sort of protection against the extra-ordinary; even the presence of such everyday things as street lights seem to reassure the citizens of Oran when they begin to sense that something is going wrong with their lives. Ironically, the evil of the plague will cause many, though not all, of the citizens to join together in a spirit of camaraderie which might otherwise have been impossible. By shedding their selfish pseudo individuality,

* Camus is not entirely clear here: Oran is, in fact, typical of the sort of contemporary society which he wishes to criticise. We must assume, therefore, that he is being ironic when he suggests that the town is different from other 'business centres'.

they will become part of a genuine community, and so find their true individuality as fully alive human beings.

Camus emphasises the city's unusual degree of geographic isolation. He points out that Oran is 'grafted on to a unique landscape, in the centre of a bare plateau, ringed with luminous hills...'(7), and, of course, surrounded by the North African desert. It is connected to the outside world by its railway and maritime routes, but these will soon be cut as the city is closed behind its walls and gates, emphasising the isolation, so that we feel a sense of actual exile from the outside world.

The attitude of the money-making citizens does not mitigate this feeling; even before the port is closed, the town 'turns its back on the bay, with the result that it is impossible to see the sea.' In this way, Camus creates a metaphysical as well as a geographical separation, so that the physical setting becomes a metaphor for Camus' idea that man is alone in his utter responsibility for his ideas and actions: there is no God to turn to for help or guidance, whatever needs to be done, needs to be done by man alone in his awful freedom.

The ideas of separation and exile are further intensified by the lack of regard shown by Oran to the world of nature; by the contrast which Camus creates between the spectacularly beautiful surroundings of Oran and the banality of the 'ugly' treeless and pigeonless streets, 'a thoroughly negative* place ... [where] the seasons are discriminated only in the sky' (5). (Although we do have a description of trees in Oran later in the novel).

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* Stuart Gilbert translates *un lieu neuter* as 'a thoroughly negative place', but this phrase seems to suggest some degree of dynamism or reversal of normal values; Robin Buss gives us a more literal translation as 'a neutral place', (PL, Buss, p5) a more simple phrase which seems to capture the lack of animation which Camus is seeking to describe: we might say that Camus' Oran is far too banal to be 'thoroughly negative'.

Spring is largely ignored, except for the flowers in the market place, Summer is unbearably hot so that 'the sun bakes the houses bone-dry', Autumn brings 'deluges of mud' while only winter is 'really pleasant.' This is certainly no promotional literature for the local tourist industry.

The point is that, for Camus, nature is neither benign nor hostile, but totally indifferent to the aspirations of man. Catherine Savage Brosman observes: 'The sun is both friendly and murderous* ... The wind is often hot, burning and feverish... and it can carry contagion ... [or] can cleanse and liberate ... bringing freshness from the sea.'[3] When Rieux and Tarrou go for their swim after Tarrou's 'confession,' the sea is described as 'supple and sleek as a creature from the wild' (209). The likeness to a sort of living, friendly animal is continued: 'Slowly the waters rose and sank ... with their tranquil breathing', and the 'sea was warm that night with the warmth of autumn seas that borrow from the shore the accumulated heat of the long days of summer' (210). We see that Camus' sea is, at least at first, much more friendly than Greene's 'sea beast' with its sinister sentience, but Camus soon abandons his anthropomorphic cosiness and reminds us of the indifference of the sea by reference to the 'ice-cold' current in which the swimmers are suddenly caught. But they find this invigorating: 'Their energy whipped up by this trap the sea had sprung on them.' Perhaps this 'trap' is the sudden confrontation with cold reality which so shocks mankind after it has been lulled into imagining that there is a natural world which in some way 'cares' or is affected by the aspirations of man. Implicit here is Camus' positive scepticism. We are not to be defeated by the idea of being alone in a silent universe, but invigorated by the extent of our freedom and responsibility. The happiness which Tarrou and

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* There is a note of anthropomorphism here which is not entirely appropriate, although we may notice that Camus himself indulges in such imagery later in the text, especially when describing the plague itself.

Rieux experience together is without illusions, 'a happiness that forgot nothing, not even murder.'

The structure of the novel is such that the character of Dr Rieux will play a pivotal role in each of its five parts. The voice of the 'narrator' in fact turns out to be that of Dr Rieux, so that the other characters as well as the successive events of the narrative are necessarily seen through his eyes, although he does claim to make extensive use of the notebooks of Jean Tarrou, particularly with regard to the character of Cottard.

We will firstly examine the way in which part one sets up the situation which is developed throughout the rest of the novel. From the end of part one, however, I suggest that the book may be described as a chronicle of the journeys of its main characters, from their first meeting with the plague toward the point where they either come to a deeper and more meaningful engagement with life, or work towards the consequences of their beliefs in their confrontation with death.

For this reason, a part by part analysis does not seem to be the best way to proceed, as the journeys to which I have referred range over several of the parts, or even over the whole novel. Therefore, after our examination of part one, we will look at some of these journeys, and how they reflect or contrast with Camus' own ideas about the nature (or the absurdity) of existence.

Part One

We will see how each of the main characters is brought into contact with one another through their contact with Dr Rieux (with the exception of Grand and Cottard, who meet each other before they meet the doctor). We will also see that the various relationships of the male characters to the female characters are at least to some extent a reflection of Rieux's relationship with either his wife or his mother. Camus describes some of these relationships against a sinister background of the developing epidemic.

The plague itself is first presented to us when Dr Rieux steps on the corpse of a dead rat on his landing one morning. M Michel, the door porter, indignantly denies the very possibility of there being rats in the building: 'There weren't no rats here' (9). This will be the initial reaction of most people, who will just refuse to believe that there is anything significant in the portents around them. This reaction, or lack of reaction, will be reflected in the attitude of Rieux's colleagues, Dr Richard and Dr Castel, which, again, will be typical of the inertia and bureaucracy of the local administration which will try to do nothing at all until it is absolutely forced to. During the initial stages of the infection, despite clear warning signs of a dangerous and developing threat of an infectious disease, they decide on a policy of 'wait and see'* (44).

When Rieux returns from his visits later in the day, he is confronted with a 'big rat ... [which] moved uncertainly ... then spun round on itself with a little squeal and fell on its side. Its mouth was slightly open and blood was spurting from it' (9). This disconcertingly graphic description serves to shock us into realising the horrible

* This is clearly a reference to the inaction of the French and British Governments as Germany grew stronger and more aggressive, ignoring the warnings of de Gaulle and Churchill.

nature of the coming plague, but Camus shocks us even more by saying that the 'glimpse of spurting blood had switched his thoughts back to ... his wife.'

She is ill with tuberculosis and is leaving Oran for a sanatorium, while Rieux's mother will shortly arrive to keep house during her absence. Mme Rieux senior will prove to be calm, kind and patient, saying little, and content to sit in the window, awaiting her son's return each day; yet she is capable of showing strength and resilience, especially when they look after the dying Tarrou.

Elements of this separation will be reflected in the relationship of many of the main characters to the women in their lives. Rambert is separated from his sweetheart who is in Paris while he is trapped in Oran, while Grand is separated from his wife, Jeanne, who left him years before. The exception here is the in case of old Dr Castel, whose elderly wife returns to join him despite the fact that their marriage was not 'all that could be desired.'

We can see that the young women are mainly absent, and that the only female presence which is retained through the text is that of the older, more motherly figures; yet even these are mainly silent. Father Paneloux has his rather severe old lady to look after him, while the Spanish sentries who will conspire with Rambert for his escape have their old 'dried up little wisp' of a mother who seldom spoke (yet who was to give Rambert some significant advice as we shall see). Jean Tarrou's mother is dead, but would be with him still if she were alive – she merely 'effaced herself rather more than usual'. Mme Othon is also shrouded in silence, so that she is unable to find words when her son is diagnosed as having plague, and seems to exist only as far as M Othon, the magistrate will allow her to.

It also seems probable that Rieux's own relationship with his wife may not have been going quite well. When he sees her off at the station, he feels the need to ask her to 'forgive him', and first mentions an idea which will form one of the recurring motifs of the novel, that of having a second chance to put right something which one has failed to do or say. When he has seen her into the carriage, he says to her, '... once you're back everything will be better. We'll make a fresh start.' She replies: ''That's it! ... Let's make a fresh start' (11). The implication may be that they had failed in some way to communicate adequately with each other in the past. When he says 'please dear... take great care of yourself'(12), she could not hear him because of the noise around them, perhaps an analogy of their married life: living together, yet not hearing each other. Perhaps he was never able to find the right words with which to express himself; the phrase, 'everything will be alright' is a banality which we have all used when we could find nothing better to say. (This introduces another motif, that of not being able to find the right words, which is epitomised by the character of Grand).

The rats have not been forgotten during this scene. His wife asks 'What's this story about the rats that's going around?' (11). We see that Rieux himself is not yet taking this really seriously when he replies that 'it'll pass.' As the doctor leaves the platform, he meets M Othon the police magistrate, holding his small boy by the hand' (12). (The death of M Othon's son will later prove to be not only horrific and heartbreaking, but a turning point in the novel). M Othon says 'These rats now...', but Rieux is pre-occupied with his separation from his wife. He 'made a brief movement in the direction of the train,' and replied 'The rats! ... it's nothing.' Again he misses

the significance of the remark, but later remembers that, just at that moment, a porter walked past with a 'box of dead rats under his arm.'

Why has Camus taken such pains to make sure that the females are either absent or silent? Could it be that Camus is trying to create the kind of male environment that soldiers would find themselves in during a time of war? Their womenfolk would obviously be absent, creating a similar sense of exile and separation, and, in a way, these men *are* on the front line in their battle against the plague. Or could it be that the novel is really about just one male character, and that the seeming multiplicity of characters is just a reflection on the possible choices open to that character – a sort of collection of Jungian 'archetypes'? Perhaps a more realistic alternative is that this is a reflection of the rather chauvinistic attitude of the French Resistance toward women. Julian Jackson tells us that 'If women did not fight much in the French resistance it was partly because men did not want them to.'[4] It seems that women were not welcomed as combatants by many resistance fighters who condescendingly sought to confine them to the role of 'the woman in the door,'[5] faithfully waiting for their men folk to return from the fight. Of course, there were many brave women who ignored such nonsense and risked their lives courageously in the fight against fascism, a fact of which Camus was perfectly well aware, as we know from the introduction.

So far, every major character which we have met through Rieux has discussed the business of the rats with him. This trend continues, but from now on Rieux himself seems to take the phenomenon more seriously, asking others about the rats rather than just replying absently to questions. Let us follow the sequence a little longer.

Rieux next meets Raymond Rambert, a young, ex soccer-playing journalist from Paris, who wishes to write an article on the living conditions of the Arab population. Rieux declines to help, but suggests that he 'might like to say something about the extraordinary number of dead rats that were being found in the town just now.' Rambert is intrigued: 'That certainly interests me' (13).

The doctor almost immediately afterward meets Jean Tarrou, (whose presence in Oran is never really explained). Tarrou is 'gazing down at the convulsions of a dying rat' (13). He, also, is intrigued: 'Personally I find it interesting, yes, definitely interesting,' but goes on to say that 'really, doctor, it's the porter's headache, isn't it?' We may notice that, though both Rambert and Tarrou are 'interested' in the dying rats, they nevertheless remain detached. Rambert is interested as a journalist, while Tarrou is interested from the point of view of an observer who records the events around him in his notebooks (which will be of great use to Rieux when he comes to compose his 'chronicle').

A little later, Rieux is sitting in his parked car outside his flat, when he sees Father Paneloux, a local 'militant Jesuit', whom the doctor has met previously. The priest is helping M Michel, (who has been taken ill with what will turn out to be the first known case of the plague), down the street.

When asked what he thinks of the 'queer business about the rats,' Paneloux replies 'Oh, I suppose it's an epidemic they've been having' (17). But his 'eyes were smiling,' which suggests that he saw nothing significant or sinister in the 'queer business.'

Rieux is called on the telephone soon after, by Joseph Grand to attend what turns out to be an attempted suicide by Cottard. He asks Grand if 'the rats had quite

disappeared in this part of town?' But 'Grand had no idea ... I've other things to think about' (19).

All have so far been shown as rather detached from the phenomenon, but Cottard proves to be an exception. After entering Cottard's room, Rieux 'stopped short. In the intervals of the man's breathing he seemed to hear the little squeals of rats' (18). This rather odd statement immediately suggests that there is something strange and different about Cottard. Rieux does not speak to him about the rats, but seems almost to identify him with them. All the other characters are distanced from the rats and consequently the plague which will follow from them, whereas Cottard seems, in some way, to be part of the plague himself. He is the only one who will 'blossom out' during the epidemic, and be sorry to see the end of it.

At the end of part one, we have all the main characters introduced to us through the medium of Rieux, and against a background of the dying rats and the developing plague. It might be useful to summarise the initial relationship of some of the characters to the rats and therefore the plague at this point:

Rieux – dismissive at first, but this is perhaps due to his preoccupation with his wife's departure. He very soon comes to take the situation very seriously, and is the first to utter the word 'plague.'

Rambert and Tarrou – interested but detached, it's not their 'headache.'

Grand and Paneloux – dismissive, better things to think about.

Cottard – it is not yet clear, but he will come to welcome the pestilence, and thrive under it. His attitude will be almost the exact opposite of the others.

Following my earlier suggestion, we will now examine the journeys of some of the main characters, as they confront the situation in which they find themselves.

The journey of Raymond Rambert: from selfishness to self-knowledge.

As we have already seen, Rambert first meets Rieux in connection with a story which he wishes to write for a Paris newspaper about the living conditions of the Arab population of Oran. Rieux declines to be interviewed when the journalist admits that he would not be able to 'state the facts without paltering with the truth' (12). This sets Rambert up, initially, as a crass young reporter, hacking around for a story rather than dealing genuinely with important issues.

When they next meet, Rambert has been trapped in Oran by the closing of the town, while the girl he loves remains in Paris. He had been around all the offices of the town's bureaucracy in an attempt to get permission to leave, because, as he saw it: 'I don't belong here' (42). After a brush with one official he had 'shrugged his shoulders petulantly and walked out.' He asks Rieux to help, but the doctor refuses because of his 'official position', at which Rambert 'tossed his head petulantly' (74). It seems that Camus is leaving us in no doubt about the young man's thoughtless and rather childish attitude. Rambert accuses Rieux of being unable to understand the pain of separation (being ironically unaware of Mme Rieux's absence), and of living 'in a world of abstractions.' There is further irony here in that Rambert claims to be thinking about real people as opposed to Rieux's concern with abstractions, but yet it is Rambert who is proposing to escape to secure his own happiness, while it is Rieux who intends to stay and do what he can to actually help the real, living or dying victims of the plague.

Rambert is helped by Cottard to get in touch with a group of smugglers who will be prepared to help Rambert to escape; Rieux refuses to condemn him for this, and in fact wishes him success: 'perhaps I, too, would like to do my bit for happiness' (166). From now on, we begin to see a gradual deepening in Rambert's attitude. Escape isn't as easy as he had hoped; he is disappointed several times, and constantly has to start again from the beginning. He feels the need to explain himself to the doctor, with words like 'I don't think I'm afraid to risk my skin' (135), showing, perhaps, the beginnings of self-examination. He reveals that he fought in the Spanish civil war, but we may wonder whether that was not from a sense of youthful adventure rather than a commitment to freedom.

The young reporter feels that neither Tarrou nor Rieux can appreciate his situation, saying 'You two ... you've nothing to lose in all this' (136), at which, Tarrou tells him about Rieux's wife being in a sanatorium. This seems to have a chastening effect on the young man, so that very early the next morning he rings Rieux and asks, 'Would you agree to my working with you until I find some way of getting out of this town?' (137).

Eventually, he is introduced to the two Spanish sentries to whom we referred earlier, and who have been offered bribes to allow his escape from the town. He arranges to stay at their home while they wait for the right opportunity to put their plan into operation, and it is here that he meets their old mother. When she finds out that he does not believe in God, she says that of course he must go to his wife, 'Or else – what would be left you?' (166). We may imagine how this telling phrase may have rankled in the young man's mind. Did he ask himself whether there really *was* nothing else but his relationship with the girl which makes his life worth living?

Finally his escape is arranged, but he cannot bring himself to go. He decides that it would be 'shameful to be happy by oneself,' and that 'this business is everyone's business' (170). We may compare, ironically, the words he uses here with the words he used earlier when Rieux suggested that Rambert's plans to escape are 'none of his business,' to which Rambert replied, 'Excuse me but it *is* your business' (74).

Rambert is subsequently present at the death of M Othon's young son, Jacques. He comes into the room where the child lies dying. He 'took a packet of cigarettes from his pocket. But after his first glance at the child's face he put them back' (174). No-one except a monster could be unaffected by such a situation, and the act of putting away his cigarettes seems to confirm that Rambert is putting away his own needs for the time being, in the face of such overwhelming tragedy.

So Rambert has completed his journey. He had felt a 'stranger' in the town, an outsider exiled in a strange land of which he could not feel a part. In fact, he has experienced a sort of double alienation, in that he was exiled *from* the town that he was exiled *in*. But now he has become part of a human community; he has found a homeland, so that, when the separation from his lover is over, his joy is not merely private, but increased beyond measure by his ability to share it with the others around him.

The Journey of Father Paneloux: the failure of 'illusions.'

Father Paneloux was a Jesuit priest, who, we are told, was also an expert on ancient inscriptions and the works of St Augustine of Hippo. We met him earlier when he showed his initial indifference to the 'epidemic' amongst the rats.

In part two of the book he delivers a belligerent sermon at the cathedral of Oran in which he tells his congregation that they 'deserve' the plague which has visited them, because of their indifference to God. He separates himself from his hearers by addressing them as 'you', seeming to stand aside, self-righteously, from any personal blame in the matter (80).

We can see that Camus is setting him up as the advocate of the sort of religious ideology which portrays a wrathful and vengeful God; a God who is apparently happy to contemplate the suffering of the innocent as a sort of sop to an outraged and divine pride; an ideology which is highly repugnant to most thinking people, including many Christians. But I suggest that he has either wilfully or carelessly misinterpreted the kind of doctrine which we should expect from an intellectual Jesuit, particularly one steeped in St Augustine. Of course, St Augustine did suggest quite clearly that 'As the Supreme Good, [God] made good use of evil deeds for the damnation of [some] ... and the salvation [of others]',[6] which seems to leave scope for Paneloux's 'flail' (see below p63), but we shall nevertheless see that parts of his sermon are not really theologically sound.

The idea that Camus has not correctly understood Augustine may seem to be a strange claim to make in view of the fact that he wrote, in 1936, a treatise in order to qualify for his teaching certificate at the University of Algiers, entitled *Christian metaphysics and Neoplatonism: Plotinus and Augustine.* Olivier Todd tells us that Camus, in order to prepare for his thesis, 'carefully read and scribbled in the margins of the two volumes of Augustine's *Confessions*,' but it seems that the result was not really satisfactory, although it just allowed him to qualify for his teaching certificate. Todd goes on to tell us that 'the Augustine expert Paul Archembault, called Camus'

work "very muddled and confused."'[7] Perhaps if should not be surprising, therefore, if some of the concepts which Camus puts into the mouth of Paneloux also seem to be "confused."

As an example of this, Paneloux's suggestion that God 'grew weary of waiting' (81) becomes incoherent when juxtaposed with one of Augustine's main tenets, that God exists outside time: 'O Lord ... you are outside time in eternity'.[8] It becomes even more strange when we are given an image of an eternal God who just can't wait any longer, contrasted with the 'angel of the plague ... patient and watchful', apparently biding his time, waiting for God to become impatient and lose his temper, so that he can be allowed to wreak his bloody havoc on God's behalf. Interestingly, Augustine's 'proof' that time does not exist – *the future does not yet exist, the past has ceased to exist, while the present has no duration and so also cannot exist*[9] – seems to be strangely echoed in a phrase used by Camus to describe the state of mind of the citizens of Oran during their enforced exile: 'hostile to the past, cheated of the present, impatient of the future'(62), as if they too are 'outside time', isolated chronologically as well as physically from the mainstream of life flowing around them. Perhaps Camus is portraying God, through Paneloux, as a sort of projection of the humanity of the citizens of Oran, with all their hostilities, their impatience at having their lives disrupted by the plague, and their sense of being somehow cheated.

The idea that God can be a reflection of the predicates of humanity seems to accord with a passage from Camus' *Notebooks,* which he wrote in 1945, at a time when he was actually working on *The Plague*:

> It is up to us to create God. He is not the creator. That is the whole history of Christianity. For we have but one way to create God, which is to become Him*.[10]

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* Perhaps Camus had been reading Voltaire: 'If God did not exist it would be necessary to create Him'.[11]

This is a typical expression of the theory of 'projection', which claims that religion is really a sort of *animism*, in which the qualities of a human being are 'projected' and enlarged into the idea of gods or spirits. This was seen as the necessary means by which primitive man was able to make sense of the world around him, and is something which mankind should now outgrow. Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-72) was one of the most famous proponents of this concept, in which theology is seen to become anthropology. He wrote that:

> The divine being is nothing else than the human being ... contemplated and revered as another, a distinct being. All the attributes of the divine nature are, therefore, attributes of the human nature.[12]

It is also rather difficult to equate the behaviour of Paneloux's murderous God with the Christian idea that 'God is love', but this can also be explained, according to Feuerbach, by the projection theory. A human being can be capable of both love and hatred at different times, and so God becomes a being who *sometimes* loves, but who also, according to His 'human' nature, is also capable of vengeful destruction. Feuerbach writes:

> God appears to me in another form besides that of love; in the form of omnipotence, of a severe power not bound by love; a power in which ... the devils participate.[13]

This is surely the true image of Camus' God. When we consider the idea of the suffering of the people of Oran, their agony and grief, especially that of innocent children like Jacques Othon, then the idea of a 'severe power not bound by love' seems utterly appropriate. Camus, as a humanist, seems to be using Paneloux to portray, not the Christian idea of a loving God, but an appalling image drawn from ideas such as those of Feuerbach, where we meet a God who performs acts in which the 'devils participate.'

Paneloux tells his congregation that the 'plague is the flail of God ... and implacably He will thresh out his harvest until the wheat is separated from the chaff.' (80/1) But then he goes on to say that 'this calamity was not willed by God.' To suggest that God will do something which it is not his will to do must be regarded as both heretical and self-contradictory by any religious believer, and an intellectual Jesuit disciplined in the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius Loyola would surely have been appalled by this sort of sophistry. David Chidester tells us that 'In his *Spiritual Exercises,* Ignatius developed techniques for working with mental imagery, emotions, and the internal senses,'[14] but Paneloux's image of the 'flail of God' as a 'huge wooden bar ... striking at random ... in a shower of drops of blood'(82), is difficult to reconcile with his subsequent idea of 'god in action ... unfailingly transforming evil into good' (83). Many of the priest's images in this first sermon seem to have more in common with a disciple of Torquemada rather than a follower of Ignatius.

Of more interest, perhaps, is the idea that 'He has turned His face away from us. And so, God's light withdrawn, we walk in darkness...' (81). (although this may be seen to be rather more along the lines of Rambert's petulant behaviour than an example of divine wrath). Nevertheless, the idea of being deprived of the sight of God's face is more in keeping with Augustine's doctrine of 'original sin', containing echoes of the 'Fall' and the story of Cain and Abel. The citizens of Oran, are exiled from the presence of God or 'hidden from God's face' (Gen. 4.14). A Christian might see this exile as the direct result of the sins of Adam and Cain, while for Camus, the exile might represent the 'abandonment' of man in a universe which is silent because it is empty of meaning.

Tarrou later asks Paneloux to join the 'sanitary squads' which he has formed: 'He thought it over, then said "Yes"' (125). Of course Paneloux would have to think carefully: if the plague is really 'God's flail' and working for our own good, would he be opposing God if he helped in the fight against it? Rieux says that 'he's glad to know that he's better than his sermon'(126), suggesting that, perhaps for Camus as well as Rieux, Father Paneloux as a man, is of greater worth than as a priest.

It is when the Paneloux is present at the death of Jacques Othon, however, that his real crisis point is reached. Here there can be no talk of flails and punishment; the child is obviously innocent of any crime. At the height of the boy's suffering, he falls to his knees and prays, 'My god spare this child ... !'; but God is silent, and the boy dies. Paneloux subsequently has a conversation with Rieux in which he suggests that the boy's death 'passes our human understanding,' but that we should 'love what we cannot understand' (178), He seems to be suggesting something like a Kierkegaardian 'leap of faith,' but yet when Rieux says that he refuses 'to love a scheme of things where children are put to torture,' Paneloux feels 'disquietude,' and then makes the enigmatic remark: 'Ah doctor ... I've just realised what is meant by "grace".' What exactly he was suggesting by this is never made clear, but perhaps a clue may be found in Christopher Kirwan's remarks on Augustine's idea of predestination: '...men are not able to "fulfil the divine commands" without God's aid, nor even to "will and believe" aright without God's "acting" ... these benefits come as grace...'[15] If Paneloux is really thinking along these lines, then he may have decided that faith is the undeserved gift of God, so that it should be seen as a great and lonely responsibility which must be cherished and adhered to under any circumstances. Further, that if it is God's will to withhold this gift from some – for example Rieux,

this also must be accepted. Perhaps this idea might even lie behind Rieux's strange remark: 'mightn't it be better for God if we refuse to believe in Him, and struggle with all our might against death ...? (108). Could it be that Paneloux might see this as a deliberate withholding of the grace of faith, in order that the doctor should get on with the business of ministering to the body, while others minister to the soul? Perhaps we can also begin to see how Paneloux is led to the idea that a priest should not consult a doctor if he becomes ill, but accept the fact that, by the grace of God, he has been allowed to share in the general suffering: an idea which he uses for an essay on which he largely bases his second sermon in part four of the book.

The second sermon is very different in tone from the first, at least in part as a result of the effect which the death of Jacques Othon has had on the priest. Gone is the self-confidence where Paneloux claims to know what God is doing to 'You my brethren'; he now, as the narrator points out, addresses his congregation in terms of 'we.' Perhaps, like Rambert, he has realised that he has been existing as an exile within his own community, and now wishes to end this separation in order to share in the life and the suffering of those around him. He seems to be humbled and wrestling with disillusionment when he suggests that 'we must believe everything or deny everything' (183), a strange concept for an orthodox Christian to hold. He goes on to claim that there were 'periods in history when Purgatory could not be hoped for ... when every sin was deadly ... it was all or it was nothing' (184). Of course he has just condemned the whole of humanity which is unfortunate enough to be alive at one of those 'periods in history' to eternal damnation on the basis that they are all sinners, without exception.

But he 'sees it through to the end.' He refuses to give up his faith, and he does not consult a doctor when he becomes ill. Perhaps, as we suggested earlier, this may be seen as an attempt by Paneloux to justify his faith in the face of the suffering of Jacques Othon by actually sharing in that suffering. After a terrible night of illness, he is described by the old lady who grudgingly cares for him as looking like somebody who had been 'severely thrashed all the night long' (190). Camus is obviously referring to Paneloux's 'flail of God' here; the priest has become the victim of his own narrative it would seem. He dies of indeterminate symptoms, with a crucifix in his hands, and a 'look of serenity' in his eyes, described on his medical card as a 'doubtful case' (191).

What had Father Paneloux achieved at the end of his journey? Camus seems to find the priest's end grimly humorous in the way he describes him as having been 'soundly thrashed' (by God's flail?) and a 'doubtful case,' and also seems to be suggesting that he was merely stubborn in keeping true to his faith: that there really *is* no answer to the problem of evil in the world because there is no God to give such an answer. Because of his failure to face this 'truth,' he has arrived nowhere and achieved nothing.

As a dramatic contrast to the secular ideas of the other characters, the character of Father Paneloux performs the task which Camus requires of him, but as an accurate description of the religious alternative to 'humanism,' (and I suggest that this is what Camus wants us to accept), then he is far too narrow, as well as being theologically unsound. His attempt, in the second sermon, to end his exile and separation from his congregation is moving, but it seems that, for Camus, we are meant to think of him as being of real value only when he works for the sanitary squads, and as a failure in his

role as a priest. But, as a portrayal of the religious dimension of human existence, it seems that he may also be a failure as a literary creation.

The Journey of Jean Tarrou: the failure of an outsider.

Tarrou keeps a series of notebooks, a sort of 'discursive diary', containing seemingly random details of the life of the town, but with a detachment which is expressed as 'observing events and people through the wrong end of a telescope' (23). He describes the 'dapper little old man... with a soldierly bearing,' whose chief pleasure seems to be luring cats out to where he can spit on them from his balcony (24). Another curious entry is the question: 'How contrive not to waste one's time? *Answer:* By being fully aware of it all the while.' This would might seem reasonable at first glance, but he goes on to list a series of totally useless activities which involve some sort of physical or mental discomfort, such as 'listening to a lecture in a language one doesn't know,' or 'queuing at the box-office of theatres and then not booking a seat,' as examples of not wasting time.

When the manager of his hotel tells him about the 'queer kind of fever, from which one of his chambermaids is suffering, assuring him that 'it's not infectious,' Tarrou replies that it is 'all the same to me.' Yet he nevertheless insists that he is 'not a fatalist' (26).

What we seem to have is an enigmatic young man to whom the trivial details of life seem important, yet something which would be of vital interest to the average man – such as whether or not a disease is contagious – does not. He shows interest in the old, Spanish, asthma patient, who stays in bed all day with two pans in front of him, one of which is filled with dried peas, and who seems to be happy to spend his

whole waking time counting peas from one pan into the other, another example of a seemingly useless pursuit.

With regard to Father Paneloux's first sermon, Tarrou makes a significant comment: 'At the beginning of a pestilence and when it ends, there's always a propensity for rhetoric ... it is in the thick of the calamity that one gets hardened to the truth, in other words to silence' (98). We seem to be brought once again to the idea that we are confronting an indifferent universe, and that, when the illusions of 'habits' are stripped away, we are left with the reality that 'truth' is 'silence.'

This confusion of ideas and impressions is not explained until later in the novel, when Tarrou makes his 'confession' to Rieux on a balcony overlooking the bay.

Tarrou tells Rieux how, as a child, he and his father had been very close. When he was seventeen, he was invited by his father, who was Director of Public Prosecutions, to witness a trial in which he was involved. Tarrou becomes horrified when his father demands the death penalty for the defendant, 'a yellow owl scared by too much light ... a living human being' (202/3). He remembers that 'I only knew that they were set on killing that living man' (203). As a result of this, Tarrou has a revulsion of feeling, and decides that he cannot be part of any society which will countenance the death penalty.

Tarrou's father had seemingly taken his son into the courtroom in order to impress him with his abilities; perhaps we might see this as the father's 'offering' to the son: a sort of reversal of Cain's offering to God. Tarrou rejects the offering, thereby deliberately exiling himself from his father's presence, and also exiling the father from the world which Tarrou will create for himself. This world, however, is a 'world without hope' (237) as Rieux will comment after Tarrou's death.

Tarrou had joined various, unspecified revolutionary organisations in an effort to combat a society which could condone 'murder in its most despicable form,' only to find that they also were 'mad-crazy over murder and they couldn't stop killing men even if they wanted to' (206). Unable to join with any group or organisation, he becomes a true 'outsider', saying 'I know I have no place in the world of today' (207). but yet he is prepared to engage actively with the fight against the plague, serving society or, rather, humanity without ever becoming part of it.

He needs to fight the plague, both literally and metaphorically, because he believed that he 'had the plague already, long before I came to this town and encountered it here' (207). He seems to be referring to the way in which people live their 'unexamined' lives without ever raising their eyes to the truths around them, and are prepared to kill anyone who threatens their banal existence. Tarrou admits that he has the plague 'like everybody else ... only there are people who don't know it, or feel at ease in that condition ... I've always wanted to get out of it' (201).

Tarrou conceives the idea of becoming a 'secular saint' (PL 208), which seems to mean that he will chose a way of life which involves the least risk of harming others, becoming, in his words; 'The good man who infects hardly anyone' (Pl 207). It might be interesting to consider, at this point, whether or not Camus thought of Tarrou as a secular version of Gandhi. For Gandhi, 'there is no other God than Truth ... and the only means for the realisation of Truth is Ahimsa.'[16] (The term 'Ahimsa' refers to the Buddhist idea that the 'quintessence of wisdom [is] not to kill anything ... and [to] do no harm to anybody, neither by thoughts, nor by words, nor by acts.'[17]) Ahimsa becomes the Hindu principle of 'harmlessness', and to achieve this, 'one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself.'[18] We can see these ideas in Tarrou's non-

judgemental attitude to the 'yellow owl' and the asthma patient, and particularly his total rejection of the death penalty. His desire to be 'The good man who infects hardly anyone' can be understood in contrast to his claim that 'he already had the plague', that is, the disease from which mankind suffers which makes it 'mad crazy over murder' (206).

Of course, it might be objected that they are fundamentally different in their outlook, in the sense that for Tarrou there *is* no God, while Gandhi is intensely spiritual in his worldview. But yet we may wonder whether they really are so far apart when we sum up their ideas in this way: for Tarrou, there is no God only truth and harmlessness, while, for Gandhi, God *is* the Spirit of Truth and the path to Truth is harmlessness. Perhaps this allows us a deeper insight into the idea of a 'secular saint'.

We are now able to understand his interest in the old Spaniard, the cat-spitting man, and the strange ways of not 'wasting time;' they are all, likewise, completely harmless activities, especially in that they involve no possibility of causing the death of any person. He asks himself the question concerning the cat-man, 'had he been a saint?' (224), but we are drawn to ask how he and also the old Spaniard can be saints without being of some service to others, and it seems that Tarrou himself 'hardly thought so.' Gandhi suggests that separation or alienation from the society in which we live is incompatible with the idea of loving others: 'a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life.'[19] Tarrou also, in the quest for his own 'sainthood', engages actively in the fight against the plague, being the instigator of the sanitary squads which would become so essential to the battle. But yet he seems to be motivated by his own pseudo-spiritual needs rather more than a genuine concern for those around him. He is trying to cure his own plague and ends up by dying of 'both

varieties of plague at once' (231). It seems that Camus wants us to see him as suffering from the actual bacillus as well as trying to resist the plague which he brought with him: the plague of being involved with the killing of human beings who have broken the arbitrary laws of society. In this sense, Tarrou becomes, simultaneously, a victim and a potential killer.

He wants to 'make a good end of it,' but at the last, he will 'roll over, face to the wall, and die with a short hollow groan' (236). Camus seems to be suggesting that Tarrou has failed because of his self-imposed exile from the human community. The plague which he 'already had' could not be cured, as Rambert had discovered, in isolation from his fellow man.

Tarrou's journey was really almost complete before the novel begins: from innocent child to a young man in revolt, and from a revolutionary activist to a failed saint. He has refused to accept any arguments which might persuade him to become part of society, so that his faith, like that of father Paneloux, is 'blindly obstinate.' His death, like that of Paneloux (although treated with a good deal more compassion than that of the priest), is also used by Camus to suggest the inevitable failure of those who either refuse or are unable to rid their lives of illusions. Tarrou clings, hopelessly, to his idea of secular sainthood till the end, yet we seem to glimpse Camus' compassionate awareness of the paradoxical nature of humanity, when he later allows Dr Rieux to meditate upon the life of Tarrou. We again have the image of the movement of human existence through time, but, for Tarrou there seems to have been no future to look towards: he had lived 'only with what one knows and remembers, cut off from what one hopes for ... and [Rieux] realised the bleak sterility of a life without illusions' (PL 237).

The journey of Joseph Grand: a naturally good man.

'Joseph Grand couldn't find his words' (41). This almost seems to be the defining characteristic of the old municipal clerk. His other important characteristic is that of a natural desire to help others. When Cottard tries and fails to commit suicide, Grand offers to stay and watch him through the night saying, 'one's got to help a neighbour, hasn't one?' (19). Or is there some measure of guilt involved? Cottard had apparently tried to strike up a conversation with Grand on a few occasions, but Grand thought that 'he should have seen I was busy with my work' (30). Most people would feel sorry to have refused to spend some time with a neighbour who subsequently tried to commit suicide; we would feel, perhaps, that we might have helped them in some way, rather than having contributed to their isolation.

The 'work' which Grand turns out to have been engaged on was connected with a novel which he is trying to write, but he cannot get past the first sentence, so that he has to revise it over and over again. This strange inability to express himself in words has, to a certain extent, ruined his life. In general conversation he is able to fall back on clichés such as 'pretty as a picture,' or 'lost in dreams,' but at some really crucial points in his life this inability of his has proved to be disastrous.

Years previously, he had taken a temporary job as a municipal clerk, on the promise of being promoted once he showed his ability. He was overlooked, however, so that his salary remained a 'pittance' throughout his working life. He could very probably have rectified the situation with a letter of complaint to the authorities, but he just couldn't find the words to use, so that years went by while he agonised about his situation. This also led to the breakdown of his marriage to Jeanne, who had become his wife while they were both in their teens. Because of the long hours which

he had to work in order to support them 'he had failed to keep alive the feeling in his wife that she was loved' (70).

But Grand can be useful and effective in the fight against the plague. 'He had said "Yes" without a moment's hesitation' (112) when asked to become secretary to the sanitary groups, and performs essential tasks to which he can bring his own particular expertise, working conscientiously and with 'the large-heartedness that was a second nature with him.'

Grand's crisis comes at Christmas time. He had gone missing, and Rieux and Tarrou find him outside a 'shop window, full of crudely carved wooden toys' (213). Grand's eyes are streaming with tears, because it had been in front of a shop window 'dressed for Christmas' like this one that Grand and Jeanne had decide to get married in an access of happiness, so many Christmases ago. Camus' words here are very moving and significant: 'a loveless world is a dead world, and always there comes an hour when one is weary of prisons, of one's work, and of devotion to duty, and all one craves for is a loved face, the warmth and wonder of a loving heart' (231/4). Neither Grand nor Rieux can find their words at this point, but perhaps they communicate with each other all the better for that. As we have seen, Rieux has his own sorrow to bear in his separation from his wife who is ill with tuberculosis, so that he is perfectly able to understand as Grand turns to him saying merely: 'Oh, doctor, doctor ...!' He could say no more.

Rieux, too, couldn't speak; he made a vague, understanding gesture. 'At this moment he suffered with Grand's sorrow, and what filled his breast was the passionate indignation we feel when confronted with the anguish all men share' (214).

Grand, it seems, has been trying for years to write a letter to Jeanne, 'to let her be happy without remorse,' but he had not been able to find a way to say what he wanted. He is finally overcome by his longings, so that he is no longer able to hold on to his usual, quiet way of facing the world and he admits to the doctor that 'it's always been a terrible effort – only to be ... just normal. And now, well even that's too much for me.' We glimpse the anguish of a man for whom just 'being normal' seems almost impossible when he is alienated from his fellows by his lack of a common language. Can we not say that this is perhaps true, at least to a certain extent, of all of us at some point in our lives?

Almost immediately, Grand is taken ill with plague, and is cared for by Rieux and Tarrou. Grand believes that he is going to die, and asks Rieux to burn the manuscripts which contain his 'sentence,' as well as his abortive letters to his wife, but, against 'all the rules,' he recovers. Tarrou notes that he goes back to his work almost as if nothing has happened, so we see that he has regained his ability to seem 'normal'. However, things seem to have changed for him, because he is soon able to tell the doctor that he has at last found his voice in that he has written to Jeanne and 'was feeling much happier. Also he'd made a fresh start with the phrase [as he called the opening lines of his novel]' (249/50).

Grand, in his quiet way, has moved through the narrative with kindness, love and a paradoxical devotion to an apparently never ending task which may seem absurd, but has given a form of meaning to his life. Tarrou, we may assume, would approve of such an activity which, like counting peas or spitting on cats, is very unlikely to cause harm to anyone, especially when contrasted with the extra dimension of his work with the sanitary squads. Grand's heroism lay in seeming to be 'normal' against a

background of disappointment and unhappiness, which he never allowed to affect his desire to help others. Perhaps he will never finish his novel, but he finally finds his measure of happiness after surviving his confrontation with death and finding his words, at least as far as his letter to Jeanne is concerned. The fact that Camus has allowed him to live seems to confirm him as a successful human being.

The journey of Dr Rieux: a decent man.

It seems that the character of Rieux changes less than any other during the course of the novel. He is shown early on as a man who has 'no use for statements in which something is kept back' (13). Perhaps Camus wishes us to accept, right from the start, that the writer of this account of the plague is going to withhold nothing, and that his integrity will be such that we can place our trust in his truthfulness.

Rieux is kind and considerate to his wife as she leaves for the sanatorium, but he feels that 'he should have looked after her better' (11). We may conjecture that the pressure of his calling as a doctor led to him to care too much for his patients and not spend enough time with his wife. This might explain why he feels such empathy with Grand who had been in a similar situation, as we have seen in the previous section. The touching desire which both Rieux and his wife have to put things right in the future and 'make a fresh start,' carries all the tragic irony of humanity's lost opportunities to show our love for each other: she will die before their separation is over.

The love which he feels for his wife is implicit in the way he speaks to her at the station and in the way he speaks of love and the pain of separation from a loved one

throughout the novel. When Rambert decides to try to escape, Rieux refuses to help, but also refuses to judge his actions. At one point the young man thinks that 'Maybe I'm all wrong in putting love first.' Rieux's reply is telling: 'No,' he said vehemently. 'You are *not* wrong' (136). Later, when asked why he advises Rambert that he had 'better hurry up' with his escape plans, Rieux replies 'Perhaps because I, too, would like to do my bit for happiness' (166).

Rieux is accused by Rambert earlier in the text of 'dealing in abstractions' rather than real human beings, but we see the true nature of the situation when Rambert later tries to suggest that man, without love, is just an idea that is not worth dying for. But it is Rieux who refuses to accept the abstraction: 'Man isn't an idea, Rambert' (136). For any doctor, of course, man is the real, suffering human being with whom he has to deal in the course of his profession. Rieux goes on to personalise his struggle with the plague by expressing it in everyday terms which exclude any ideas of either abstraction or heroism: '...the only means of fighting a plague is – common decency ... it consists in doing my job.' It is Rieux who is confronting the reality of the situation.

Germaine Brée tells us that 'Roland Barthes, in a letter to Camus that was mostly appreciative, reproached Camus for having evaded the problem of violence by pitting the citizens of Oran against a faceless enemy and so bypassing the question of right and wrong ... It was a criticism often to be repeated.'[20] This is interesting, because Rieux consistently speaks of the plague in anthropomorphic terms such as 'a shrewd, unflagging adversary; a skilled organiser doing his work thoroughly and well',(148) or 'its energy was flagging out of exhaustion and exasperation, and it was losing ... its self-command' (219) or again, 'that precise savagery, that calculated frenzy of the

plague' (242). Is this just a sort of poetic exaggeration for dramatic effect? Or could we argue that Camus is building a complex allegory, in which the plague becomes not just a symbol of the Nazi occupation of France, but a reference to the very nature of evil itself. We can gain an insight into Camus' thinking on this point by reference to his notebook of October, 1942, where he writes:

> *The Plague* has a social meaning *and* a metaphysical meaning. It's exactly the same. Such ambiguity is in *The Stranger* too.[21]

Yet, if the universe itself is silent and impassive, then we cannot look there for 'a shrewd adversary' or a 'skilled organiser'; these are human qualities, and so it can only be a human agency which can become a malign and intentional perpetrator of human suffering. Should we see this as Camus' own variation or even caricature of Feuerbach's theories of animism and projection? (see above p63). We might then reach a point where social anthropology is at the root, not only of theology but also of metaphysics; it would then follow that the social dimension of the novel would indeed be 'exactly the same' as the metaphysical, as Camus claims.

Paneloux, in his second sermon, said that 'when we looked into the nature of Evil ... [we would see that it] included human suffering' (183). The priest has the problem of reconciling the presence of suffering in the world with a good and all-powerful God, but the humanist can dispense with theodicy; evil is either of the 'natural' kind, like an earthquake which has a purely scientific explanation, or man made, and so has a psychological explanation. In this case, the battle which Rieux, Tarrou and the others fight against the plague is a battle against man's illusions, self deception and ignorance, which is the source of all human evil. As the narrator/Rieux puts it:

'The evil that is in the world always comes of ignorance ... [men] are more or less ignorant, and it is this that we call vice or virtue; the most incorrigible vice being that

of an ignorance which fancies it knows everything and therefore claims for itself the right to kill. The soul of the murderer is blind; and there can be no true goodness or true love without the utmost clear-sightedness' (110). We can see, in this, a potent expression of the antipathy to capital punishment or 'murder in its most despicable form' (203), which was part of Tarrou's, and also Camus', basic belief.

We have seen that Rieux identified Cottard with the plague. Before the epidemic, Cottard tries to commit suicide, becoming guilty of what Augustine described as the only unforgivable sin, that of despair. But during the 'reign of terror,' he flourished, making a fortune on the black market. We later see that he becomes despondent and extremely worried as the epidemic begins to die away, until he barricades himself in his house, shooting at anyone he can see in the street, in a pointless act of desperation. Cottard even shoots a 'draggled-looking spaniel' (248) which had somehow survived the plague, as if Camus wants to underline for us the utter pointlessness of Cottard's desperate outburst of violence. Rieux emphasises his alienation from decent society by describing him as him as having an 'ignorant, that is to say lonely, heart' (247). Cottard, in his ignorance, selfishness, despair, isolation and final insanity is an example of how ignorance is at the root of human evil. His qualities seem to be the exact opposite of those of Rieux, who, in his 'common decency,' fought against death and human suffering without hesitation and without reservation, even though he knew that his victory, if it came, could not last.

Yet Camus wants us to see that Rieux achieved something which neither Tarrou nor Paneloux could hope for. His journey was not a hopeless quest for 'sainthood' or 'man's salvation,' but a determined and selfless striving towards the health and well being of those around him here and now, on this earth with no illusions that God or

grace or providence or anything else would help him; all he relied upon was his own 'common decency.' He was not able to fully share in the rejoicing at the final reunion of those who had been separated by the plague, because his own wife had died during her exile. But he had loved her, and although he was now alone under the 'cold, fathomless depths of sky' (251), he could share with those around him the knowledge that 'if there is one thing one can always yearn for, and sometimes attain, it is human love' (246).

PART TWO:

SOCIAL AND INDIVDUAL ALIENATION AND THE CONCEPT OF CHOICE

The narrator of *The Plague* tells us that 'the first thing that the plague brought to our town was exile' (Pl 60). The nature of the exile was partly individual: a confrontation with imminent mortality and the finite and isolated nature of personal human existence; and partly social: the separation and consequent alienation of a whole community from the world around it. Yet this suffering and exile which has been forced on the citizens of Oran seems to have at least one positive aspect in that it has begun the dismantling of an older and more insidious exile: an exile which has come into existence with the collusion of those who are affected by it, in the sense that they have allowed themselves to drift into a sort of easy yet unreal, pseudo existence. This idea surfaces explicitly when Rambert asks Rieux whether he feels 'that the plague has its good side; it opens men's eyes and forces them to take thought?' (Pl 105). Rieux reluctantly admits that 'It helps men to rise above themselves', but he adds, with a flash of Camus' concept of Revolt, 'All the same ... you'd need to be a madman, or a coward, or stone-blind, to give in tamely to the plague' (Pl 106).

We have heard how it is possible to 'get through the days [in Oran] without any trouble once you have formed habits' (Pl 7), and it seems that these habits are a way which the citizens have of hiding from the unpleasant realities of life. But the price which must be paid for this untroubled pseudo-existence is boredom and 'banality': 'Treeless, glamourless, soulless, the town of Oran ends by seeming restful and, after a while, you go complacently to sleep there.' The paradox here seems to be that the

bored citizens of Oran have chosen, by default, to alienate themselves from their own ability to experience life in any meaningful way.

Greene apparently feels similarly towards the anonymous Whitsun crowds on the Brighton seafront, although he doesn't seem to be as openly condescending as Camus when he describes how the 'bewildered multitudes' had

> ... stood all the way from Victoria in crowded carriages, they would have to wait in queues for lunch, at midnight half asleep they would rock back in trains to the cramped streets ... and the weary walk home. With immense labour and immense patience they had extricated from the long day the grain of pleasure ... (BR 6).

Yet he wants us to see that the 'multitudes' have a taste for 'low', shallow pleasures. They seek out the low grade and rather sad pornography of the 'peep shows' for which Fred Hale yearns, or the cheap and sordid mementoes which filled many of the shops along the seafront. In contrast to this, it is significant that Pinkie's strange sense of integrity is outraged when Cubitt buys him two examples of such 'sordid mementoes' as 'furniture for the home' which he is shortly to set up with Rose:

> ... a tiny doll's commode in the shape of a radio set labelled 'The smallest A.1 two valve receiving set in the world', and a mustard pot shaped like a lavatory seat with the legend, 'For me and my girl' (BR 149).

Of course, nothing could be more likely than these 'obscene objects' to inflame Pinkie's anger; he is already feeling a sense of outrage at having to go through with what he sees as a degrading wedding to Rose, an entanglement from which he dreamt that 'Some day he would be free again' (BR 140). To have such a reminder of the grossness and the 'lavatory smells' of his origins in Nelson place thrust at him is intolerable. We can see the contrast here between the situations of Pinkie and Fred Hale: Pinkie is alienated from 'the grossness everywhere' (BR 162) by his sheer disgust, but feels that he is being dragged into it against his will, while Hale's

separation from the pleasures of the 'multitudes' is a cause of pain for him, the 'grossness' 'pulls at his heart.' Neither, it seems, is free to choose what he wants.

Jean Tarrou's rather strange entry in his journal: 'How contrive not to waste one's time? *Answer:* By being fully aware of it all the while' (Pl 24), suggests another way of dealing with the alienation which he felt as an outsider at the edge of society. He feels that spending time 'on an uneasy chair in a dentist's waiting-room', or 'queuing at the box-office of theatres and then not booking a seat', is preferable to going 'complacently to sleep'. Camus seems to be indulging in a little tongue-in-cheek humour here, but the point he is making is nevertheless valid. Tarrou feels that he is, in this way, fully aware of his existence in time and space, separated from comfort, idleness or the anonymity of the crowd; whatever, in other words, tends to submerge his identity as an individual and take away his freedom of choice. It seems that he is almost deliberately seeking to be an exile from society in order not to separate himself from his own integrity as an individual.

In each case, the individuals involved are alienated in some way from their ability to make meaningful choices, irrespective of whether the alienation is rooted in fear, ignorance, banality, complacency, or an imagination crippled by abuse. Even Tarrou, in his desire to 'harm no-one', has created a barrier between himself and society which makes a full commitment to his existence as a human among other humans very difficult, perhaps impossible, to achieve.

If the individuals which make up a given society are not free, then, surely, society itself can be said not to be free. In its inability to make any sort of free and meaningful choices, such a society could easily become the prey of an oligarchy or tyranny, as was the case, for example, with the depressed and vulnerable society of Germany in

the thirties. Perhaps Britain and France were moving in a similar direction, or so it may have seemed to Greene and Camus. Britain had its Fascist party led by Sir Oswald Mosley, and a large section of French society would show that it was ready to assist and collaborate with the German Nazis during the occupation. Perhaps Greene was right when he suggested that his society was 'in need of violence' to save it from its alienation; and perhaps Camus' Raymond Rambert was right when he suggested that violence, in the form of the plague, was needed in order to 'open... men's eyes and force... them to take thought.' Both Greene and Camus would surely agree that, both for an individual or a society of individuals, blind, thoughtless freedom is an empty and meaningless concept.

In Part Two, I will regard the concept of alienation as a denial of individual or collective freedom. Defining freedom as the ability to make significant moral choices, I will explore the concept of alienation against a background of the concept of choice in its various manifestations.

3. AUTHENTIC CHOICES

The idea of a full engagement with life and the exercise of true freedom of choice for each individual forms the basis of the existentialist concept of 'authenticity'. To choose 'authentically' is to choose with true integrity; such choosing is seen as essential in order for an individual to come into full existence as a human being. Neither Camus nor Greene saw themselves as existentialists, yet I suggest that the idea of authenticity and the possibility or otherwise of free 'authentic' choices may be seen to permeate the works of both writers, so that it is not inappropriate to examine each from an existentialist perspective. It seems that I am not alone in this, Greene is quoted as saying that 'Gabriel Marcel, the French philosopher ... claimed that I was a Catholic existentialist and that I'd reduced hope to its smallest possible size.'[1] From such a remark, we may guess that Marcel had read *Brighton Rock.*

The most famous existentialist philosopher is probably Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80), with whom Camus came to be closely associated. Camus' first connection with Sartre came about when he wrote a review of his novel, *Nausea*, in the newspaper *Alger Républican*, in October,1938.[2] He seems to have had mixed feelings about the work, but Olivier Todd quotes Camus writing enthusiastically about Sartre himself:

> [he has] limitless gifts ... a mind from which anything can be expected ... a singular and vigorous mind whose next works and lessons we await impatiently.[3]

He first met Sartre briefly in 1943, at the opening of Sartre's play, *Les Mouches*, but later that year they met again, along with Simone de Beauvoir,[4] and began a relationship which was to become very close, until their estrangement in 1952 over a scathing review in Sartre's magazine, *Les Temps Modernes,* of Camus' book *The Rebel.*[5] There seems no doubt that they each had a profound and lasting effect on the

other, as well as both being influenced by the thinkers which contributed to the Existentialist movement.

Sartre created a system, for which he coined the term, 'Existentialism'.* It was based largely on a synthesis of the ideas of many thinkers including, notably for our purposes, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976).

Sartre begins from a completely atheistic position, using the word 'abandoned', (which, he tells us, is a favourite word of Heidegger's) to describe the human predicament in the world. 'If God does not exist ... [we are not] provided with any values or commands that could legitimise our behaviour.'[6] Man, therefore, is forced to choose his own morality and assume total responsibility for his actions. Not without a degree of hyperbole, Sartre describes this situation in terms of being 'condemned to be free ... from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does.'[7] The acceptance of this responsibility engenders a feeling of fear or 'anguish' in that there is no-one to blame for our choices except ourselves, we are 'alone without excuse'.[8] We cannot evade the consequences of our freedom or 'abandonment', because 'I must know that if I do not choose, that is still a choice.'[9] The only way to judge whether a human is living a life which is worthwhile, or even is really fully alive is 'upon the plane of strict authenticity,'[10] which is to say, without reference to any external morality or ethical guidance such as church, political party or the mores of society as a whole. A refusal to choose authentically must inevitably involve self-deception, often resorting to such claims as 'I couldn't help it' or 'that's just the way I am' in attempting to deny responsibility for some action. Such a denial would be referred to by Sartre as *mauvais foi* or 'bad faith.' Leslie Stevenson writes:

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* This actually disputed by some who claim that it was Gabriel Marcel who actually coined the term. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriel_Marcel

> Bad faith is the attempt to escape anguish by pretending to ourselves that we are not free. We try to convince ourselves that our attitudes and actions are determined by our character, our situation, our role in life, or anything other than ourselves.[11]

It will be revealing to see to what extent the characters of our main texts may be guilty of bad faith when confronted by the need to make authentic moral choices.

Heidegger coined the term 'fallenness' to describe the state into which man falls when he tries to deny the reality of his own responsibility, by hiding, inauthentically, behind such illusions as God's will or human nature as the cause or grounding of his actions. For Heidegger, man can only avoid a condition of fallenness and come close to fulfilling his potential as a human being, firstly by the exercise of free and authentic choices, and secondly by discovering the reality of his own existence as *distinct* from the existence of others, yet in the *presence* of the 'other'. Heidegger's style of writing is notoriously difficult, but he seems to be fairly accessible when he writes 'Solicitous concern is understood in terms of what we are concerned with, and along with our understanding of it. Thus in concerned solicitude the Other is proximally disclosed ...'[12] As John Cottingham expresses it (perhaps rather more clearly): 'In coming to terms with the world we are drawn into a practical community of other involved agents and thus into 'solicitous concern for others'.[13] We therefore have a two-part foundation for an authentic existence – individual freedom of choice and a concern for others which must involve an engagement with the society in which we live.

We begin to see the individualistic nature of existentialism, in that the way forward by which an individual can achieve fulfilment begins within himself. Sartre has developed his concept of authentic choice from Kierkegaard and Heidegger, but yet apparently misunderstands a crucial idea of Kierkegaard's, which seems to

undermine the coherence of some of his arguments; this is the idea that man must 'choose himself.' Before we consider this more closely, let us look briefly at authenticity through the eyes of Kierkegaard, sometimes described as 'the first existentialist',[14] and some of the apparent similarities with the positions of Sartre and also Camus.

For Kierkegaard, as for Heidegger, the only way for a human to lead a full, meaningful existence is by the exercise of genuine choices. These choices, if made freely, and without allowing the mores of society to interfere with what one really believes to be right, will be termed 'authentic'.

The idea of freeing the self from the excessive intrusion of sociological constraints is also reflected in Greene's idea of his own intellectual exile within England.* Couto suggests that Greene is deliberately choosing this exile, by practising, within his art, the 'morality' of 'not to be at home in one's home, so as to question dogma and orthodoxy as well as received views of culture [and] history.'[15] This of course requires that an individual confronts the idea of his own freedom, which involves total responsibility for his choices.

We might say that, presaging Camus, Greene, Sartre and others, Kierkegaard sees the individual as being alone in an awful confrontation with a universe in which there is nowhere to hide from the consequences of one's actions. Camus seems to capture this tellingly when, in his novel *The Fall*,(1956) the main character, Clamence, fails to help a young woman who has thrown herself, one dark evening, from a bridge over the Seine:

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* In an interview with Mario Couto in 1988, he is quoted as saying that 'I have a very great admiration for Kierkegaard,'[16] so that it may even be the case that Greene was directly influenced by Kierkegaard in this context.

> ... I heard the sound ... of a body striking the water ... Almost at once I heard a cry, repeated several times which was going downstream ... I told myself that I had to be quick and I felt an irresistible weakness steal over me (Fall 52).

Clamence knows he should try, at least, to help, but then attempts to convince himself that it is not his fault: 'I have forgotten what I thought then. 'Too late, too far...' or something of the sort ...slowly in the rain, I went away. I told no one.' His guilt is clear, and will never leave him till he faces the truth, but he tries to deny his own freedom and responsibility by hiding from the facts: 'The next day and the days following, I didn't read the papers.'

Of course, this example is extremely dramatic, but it is nevertheless true that many of the choices which we make in our everyday lives are no less concerned with the idea of total responsibility, either in what we ourselves choose to do, or in the way that we choose to react to the actions of others. We can see, therefore, that this freedom of choice is consequently inseparable from a feeling of 'anxiety' or 'dread' which is horrifying and yet fascinating; as Kierkegaard puts it, '[Man] cannot flee from dread for he loves it; really he does not love it, for he flees from it.'[17]

In order to avoid this terrible feeling of 'dread', many men live a shallow and 'inauthentic' existence, devoid of self-awareness, in which they have 'no time' to really examine their lives. Two examples of such an existence might be the hedonist, who masks his true humanity with a series of sensual pleasures, or what we might today call the 'workaholic' who fills his days with work, leaving no time for any sort of confrontation with himself as an individual. This seems to describe the citizens of Oran who, as young persons, experience passions which are 'violent and short-lived', and who later mature into 'people [who may be seen] working from morn till night and then proceeding to fritter away at card tables, in cafes, and in small talk what time

is left for living' (Pl 6). Patrick Gardiner suggests that, for Kierkegaard, such a person:

> ... remains too deeply rooted in his own mode of life and thought to attempt to liberate himself and seeks instead, by a variety of stratagems, to keep the truth from impinging upon him.[18]

We may be reminded of Socrates' idea of the futility of such a mode of existence: '...examining both myself and others is really the best thing that a man can do, and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living ...'[19]

The important thing for Kierkegaard, according to Robert Solomon, is that:

> It does not matter what others do; what matters is what one *chooses* for oneself, and then it is not *what* one chooses but *how* one chooses – passionately and personally, [not] not just by way of 'following the crowd'.[20]

Unlike Sartre, however, Kierkegaard seems to imply that it *is* possible not to choose, by a sort of passive abnegation of one's autonomy, but that the consequence will be an unconscious denial of individual existence:

> ... because [man] has neglected to choose, which is equivalent to saying, because others have chosen for him, ... he has lost himself.[21]

Greene contrasts the Whitsun holiday crowd in *Brighton Rock* with the alienated and isolated Hale. The 'bewildered multitudes' are seen as totally impersonal, an abstraction which 'uncoiled endlessly past him like a twisted piece of wire.' As we have discussed earlier, Hale is forced into an exile against his will, but he neither wants nor seeks this confrontation with himself, his real desire is to bury his consciousness in the tawdry pleasures enjoyed by the serpentine abstraction as it coils along the piers and winds in and out of the 'peep-shows' and amusement arcades. For Kierkegaard, each individual in the crowd really has the liberty to detach from this 'inauthentic' denial of self awareness, and freely choose 'his nature as an autonomous, self-directing being,'[22]

Returning to the idea of 'man's choosing himself' mentioned above: for Sartre, this means that man actually chooses what he will become, acting, as it were, as his own creator. From his atheistic standpoint, Sartre declares that man is a 'being whose existence comes before its essence'.[23] By this he means that, because there is no God in whose mind this essence can exist, it can only come into being by the agency of man, but, of course, he must first exist in order to achieve this:

> ... to begin with [man] is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be ... nothing else but that which he makes of himself. Thus there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it.[24]

If we compare Kierkegaard's idea of choosing oneself, however, we get a rather different perspective:

> '... even if a man were to choose the wrong, he will nevertheless discover, precisely by reason of the energy with which he chose, that he has chosen the wrong. For the choice being made with the whole inwardness of his personality, his nature is purified.[25]

For Kierkegaard, therefore, choosing oneself really consists in firstly looking inward to *discover* the true nature of the self, and then authentically choosing to live this reality to the full, rather than losing the self in the crowd, or 'the public' as he disparagingly puts it. Of course, for this to happen, there must be a self which already exists, complete with at least a rudimentary nature, in order for it to be discovered. From this point of view, Fred Hale does seem to have at least some basic idea of himself as an individual apart from the crowd, an idea which shows itself in the pride which he takes in doing his job no matter how scared he is of Pinkie's gang: 'the old desperate pride persisted, a pride of intellect' (BR 12). Perhaps it might be argued that this is an example of role-playing rather than a true expression of the self, but there must nevertheless be an existing individual who chooses to take on the role.

Perhaps we could say that the difference between the two thinkers is that, for Sartre, authenticity means *self-creation*, while, for Kierkegaard the object is *self-discovery*. It might be argued that Sartre has gone too far in his ideas of self-creation, and has constructed a trap for himself in his claim that authenticity is everything. He declares that:

> Whenever a man chooses his purpose and his commitment in all clearness and in all sincerity, whatever that purpose may be it is impossible to prefer another for him.[26]

This pronouncement seems to deny Kierkegaard's notion that it is possible to choose 'the wrong', and to take us in a rather strange direction, in which morality becomes subjective. We know, for example, of the respect which Sartre held for the intellectual integrity of Heidegger, but when he made his inaugural speech at the university of Freiburg, Heidegger spoke in favour of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party. Is Sartre really saying that, provided Heidegger was really sincere, he could not have preferred that Heidegger would have chosen otherwise? Or perhaps Sartre can fall back on the idea that Heidegger was 'sincere' but did not chose 'in all clearness'? Either way, he seems to be elevating the idea of authenticity to a value in its own right. It seems that, once authenticity is achieved, there is no need to go further: '... we do not believe in progress. Progress implies amelioration ...'[27]

Yet Sartre himself seems to have been guilty of bad faith or inauthenticity. Part of the famous quarrel between him and Camus in 1952 involved Sartre's attitude to the emerging scandal of the existence of Soviet 'concentration camps', an attitude which Camus regarded as a 'fundamental problem' in their relationship.[28] The reason for this was Sartre's idea that such information should be suppressed or at least made out to be less significant, so as 'not to disappoint the working class,'[29] a notion which

outraged Camus, who felt that truth must be paramount. Surely it might be argued that Sartre, by effectively lying to the workers, is taking away their freedom to choose with relevance to the true facts of the situation. Or would Sartre argue that, provided the workers chose 'in all clearness' to support *abstract* Marxist ideology, the mere details of how the Soviet Union conducted itself could make no difference to the authenticity of their choice? This might put them in a similar situation to that of Heidegger, who chose initially to support the Nazis (whom he later repudiated – at least to a certain extent*) while being ignorant of their true nature. Or perhaps Camus was correct when he suggested that 'all existentialist philosophies ... without exception suggest escape ... they find reason to hope ... [and] hope is religious in all of them' (MoS 35). It might seem strange to apply these words to the atheistic Sartre, but Camus, it seems, regarded Marxism as no less of a religion than Christianity; we find in his notebooks the comment: 'For Christians, revelation stands at the beginning of history. For Marxists, it stands at the end. Two religions.'[30] From this perspective, it might be possible to argue that Sartre is inauthentically hiding from the responsibility for his lie behind the quasi-religious ultimate and future aim of creating a workers' paradise, like some sort of heaven here on earth. Sartre is implicated, therefore, as an accessory to the crimes of the Soviets, and cannot hide from a degree of blame and responsibility.

Iris Murdoch seems to agree that the only way for man to avoid losing himself is by authentically confronting reality, adding the interesting idea that to avoid such a confrontation might actually constitute a form of Freudian neurosis:

> The energy which could save us may be employed to erect barriers between ourselves and reality so that we may remain comfortably in a self-directed dream

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* For an extremely interesting discussion of this point see: Richrd Wolin, *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Lowith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* .Princeton University Press, 2001.

> world. Freud's condition of neurosis represents this refusal of reality in favour of magical self-deception.[31]

This idea of 'magical self-deception' seems to accord rather well with some of the fantasies of Pinkie Brown, and in the next chapter we will ask whether the Boy can be read as suffering from some sort of personality disorder. Yet there is a sense in which we can almost say that Pinkie is actually making authentic choices; most criminals of his sort would indulge in the vices which the Boy disdains as we have seen, so that he chooses a life of abstinence without regard to what others might do. Yet this seems to be more of a lack than a virtue in the sense that his imagination, such as it is, just doesn't work at the sensual level. His fantasies are not sexual as might be the case with many seventeen year old boys, but we will presently see that they can in no way be described as authentic.

Perhaps the clearest example of a contrast between authentic and inauthentic behaviour in our texts is provided by Dr Rieux and Father Paneloux. Dr Rieux carries on with his work of helping others without demanding help or explanations from heaven or anywhere else. He does not judge his fellows, but assumes total responsibility for his own actions, and is even prepared to carry on without the consolation of hope, in the clear knowledge that anyone who fights the plague must, no matter how successful they are, ultimately face 'a never ending defeat' (Pl 108). There does seem to be something wrong in his past relationship with his wife, as we saw in chapter Two; perhaps some measure of bad faith on his part which makes them want to 'start again,' yet Rieux remains perhaps the most authentic of all Camus' characters.

Father Paneloux, however, is quite a different matter. Initially, Paneloux makes it clear to the citizens of Oran that he sees the plague as a deserved punishment for their

indifference to God. He is judgemental and self-righteous, placing the responsibility for the plague firmly with God and the blame on his fellow man. Paneloux claims that 'The just man need have no fear, but the evil-doer has good cause to tremble' (Pl 80). This would constitute a classic example of bad faith. Paneloux seems to see himself almost as a bystander: all this has nothing to do with him, it is just between the sinner and God. He obviously feels that he himself 'need have no fear', and that anyone who becomes a victim of the plague only has himself to blame. Of course, when Paneloux is confronted with the death of a clearly innocent child his reasoning is undermined so that he can no longer maintain this attitude. Camus sees this as a crisis where the priest, confronted with the traditional problem of evil, must choose between blind faith and a lucid, which is to say authentic, acceptance of reality. Paneloux chooses to 'love what one cannot understand', a choice which Camus would see as an inauthentic 'flight from light' (MOS p12).

It can be seen that both Greene and Camus are exploring the situation of human beings when confronted with the concept of evil, both on a secular and on a religious level. In these circumstances, an understanding of both good and evil would seem to be a prerequisite for truly authentic behaviour. Of course, such an understanding has proved elusive since Plato first sought a definition of 'the good' in *The Republic*, yet it seems that we must once again examine this ancient question in order to gain a deeper understanding of the moral implications of authentic choice. For this reason, we will defer further consideration of authentic choosing until we look at the concept of good and evil in the next chapter.

4. A CHOICE OF GOOD *AND* EVIL

In *Brighton Rock*, we have seen that Greene, seeks to draw a distinction between the knowledge of 'right and wrong' which Ida Arnold sees as encompassing the whole of morality, and the knowledge of 'good and evil' as it seems to be understood by Pinkie and Rose. Yet we have also seen that Pinkie's imagination 'hadn't awoken', so that he is unable to see others as real people at all (see above p22). Is it really possible for such a person to understand what it means to be good? He seems to sense that he has found goodness in Rose which he somehow needs in a way that he cannot really understand, but he still intends to cause her death, more for his own convenience, it seems, than anything else. He doesn't at any point seem to consider Rose as a living human being with her own emotions and feelings, except when those feelings are concerned with him. When the two of them hide in the wine cellar of Snow's, for example, in what Graham Smith describes as 'a naked confrontation of souls',[1] and she says to him, 'I don't care what you've done', he is vaguely moved so that the 'possible depths of her fidelity touched him like cheap music.' Yet it is the thought of her fidelity *to him* which affects him; it seems that he must always be the prime focus of his own feelings. Surely, real human goodness must involve an individual in the desire to perform some sort of good or moral actions which might help or support other human beings. It is not that Pinkie avoids or refrains from such actions, it just never occurs to him to act in this way. Rose on the other hand does seem to have some capacity for goodness, at least with regard to Pinkie; she almost sacrifices not only her life but, as she sees it, her very soul for him in the full knowledge of his evil nature. Ida herself often shows her generous nature and feelings for others, so that, no matter how shallow Greene may believe such feelings to be, Ida displays a compassion for

others of which Pinkie is incapable. We may be able to accept that Pinkie has a greater understanding of evil than Ida, but it is very difficult to believe that he knows more about goodness than she does. George Orwell, in his criticism of *Brighton Rock*, picks up on this lack of credibility:

> '... the central situation is incredible since it presupposes that the most brutishly stupid person can, merely by having been brought up a Catholic, be capable of greater intellectual subtlety. Pinkie the racecourse gangster [and] ... his still more limited girlfriend understand the difference ... between the categories 'right and wrong' and 'good and evil.'[2]

Although Orwell does seem to be a little unfair here in that Greene has nowhere suggested that 'brutishly stupid' people have 'intellectual subtlety' as a result of being Catholic, he does seem to be right in suggesting that it is extremely unlikely that the vicious Pinkie would have any clear idea of the difference between 'right and wrong and 'good and evil.' Yet, this does not really seem to me to be the main issue here. Greene is attempting to address a metaphysical problem in a material context. We have already seen that a lack of realism in the detail of the text, though regrettable, does not adversely affect an examination of the core issues. Also, I suggest that the difference between the categories to which Orwell refers is inevitably apparent when a materialist or Utilitarian world view is transcended by a more spiritual vision (this is not to rule out, of course, the possibility of a purely secular idea of evil). The average Catholic, along with the followers of many other theological systems, *does* understand the difference between 'wrong' as a legal concept and real 'evil'. Every child in western society who has had the slightest degree of religious education, for example, learns how the Romans 'legally' executed Christ, and we have already discussed how the Nazi state in Germany also enjoyed a large measure of legality when it committed its atrocities. In fact, unless it is possible for what we might call 'ordinary' people to

understand these crucially important ideas without the benefit of 'intellectual subtlety', there seems to be little hope that society can *ever* avoid the recurrence of such barbarities in our future civilisation.

Greene wants us to believe that Ida can never chose between good and evil, because she simply does not admit the importance or even the real existence of such concepts. Of course, this allows her to continue to enjoy her 'bit of fun', which is how she describes her life of boozy fornication, while still feeling able to say 'I've always been on the side of right' (BR p 22). Kierkegaard would say that Ida Arnold is in a state of 'despair' of which she herself is unaware. What he means here by the term 'despair' is a state of having lost oneself, of being unaware that there is any spiritual dimension to human existence; unaware of anything other than the sensual world of pain and pleasure, and, consequently, of a rather utilitarian concept of right and wrong. It is in this sense that Kierkegaard tells us that 'In unconsciousness of being in despair* a man is furthest from being conscious of himself as spirit.'[3]

We have earlier looked at Neil McEwan's suggestion that Ida is meant to represent what Greene might have seen as 'English Paganism' (see above p27), and Kierkegaard tells us that 'Paganism as it historically was and is, ... is precisely this sort of despair [unaware of itself]: it is despair but does not know it.'[4] Ida's 'sad and dissatisfied brain' (BR p151) is trying to find excuses for the fact that sensuality never brings anything but disappointment: 'men always failed you when it came to the act',

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* The use of the terms 'unaware' and 'unconsciousness' here are probably best understood today as referring to the unconscious part of the mind. We discuss Freud's ideas of 'id' and 'ego' below, and perhaps it is at the unconscious level that the drives of Ida's id are overriding her ego's (or superego's) rational knowledge that there really is a deeper spiritual dimension to her existence. We might say that she really does have an awareness of the concepts of good and evil, but that this knowledge is suppressed in her unconscious, in order that she can enjoy her 'bit of fun'. This is the state of 'despair' to which Kierkegaard is referring: despair at denying part of her reality, a sort of partial psychic suicide. Of course, she really knows all this, and could, in theory at least, do something positive to realise her true potential, but she chooses to lie to herself in order to remain 'unaware'. We can see, therefore, that this is consistent with the existentialist idea of total freedom and responsibility.

so that Ida is trying to mask the emptiness of her life with the hunt for Fred Hale's killers. It seems that Ida has to lie to herself on two levels: firstly to deny her knowledge of good and evil so that she can enjoy her 'bit of fun' (see p27 & p31 above), and again in order to mask the fact that this so called 'bit of fun' is actually no fun at all.

Perhaps Ida's dissatisfaction with fornication is a reflection of her dissatisfaction with herself. Kierkegaard offers us a psychological insight into this sort of situation when he suggestes that it is 'deceitful' to make the 'distinction ... which paganism ... make[s] between sexual love and self-love, as though this love were not essentially self-love.'[5] Ida's dissatisfaction may therefore be seen as a symptom of a sort of strange, unrequited self-love; unrequited in the sense that she is not allowing herself to become aware of her true value or potential as an ethical human being, so that the object of her love - herself - is never revealed to her. As long as Ida remains on the sensual or level, where 'ruby port', 'éclairs' or 'a bit of fun' form the basis of her life, she can never achieve an awareness of her own despair, so that a knowledge of good and evil is impossible. True ethical choice, Kierkegaard tells us, is always a case of 'either/or', (hence the title of his book, *Either/Or*). Yet - and this is the important point for Pinkie, Rose and Ida – he declares that:

> My either/or does not, in the first instance denote the choice between good and evil, it denotes the choice whereby one chooses good *and* evil/or excludes them. ... It is, therefore, not so much a question of choosing between willing the good *or* the evil, as of choosing to *will,* but by this turn the good and evil are posited.[6]

We have seen that Hale's murder soon loses its true horror for Ida, so that the hunt for his killers becomes 'a bit of fun'. It seems that the superficial nature of her sensuality is a barrier which prevents her from confronting the reality of good and evil, leaving a vacuum in her life which she seeks to fill with the concept of right and wrong, using

phrases such as 'I know what's right.' (Yet we must remember that, despite Greene's portrayal of Ida as shallow and superficial, she nevertheless achieves some tangible results which can be described as moral: she saves Rose from suicide and brings justice down on Hale's killer).

It seems that it is possible for humans, by a selfish and self-defeating surrender to sensuality, to alienate themselves from their own power of authentic choice, which Kierkegaard suggests is the power to will. The tragedy for such people, along with the likes of Ida Arnold, and indeed the 'citizens of Oran' (at least before the plague disturbs their 'slumbers'), is that not only do they give up their power of will, but are unaware (at least *consciously*) that they are so doing; they 'believe' that they are making choices in their life when, in fact, they are actually in despair at their impotence. This is, of course, why such people must pursue a constant search for reassurance and self-delusion; this could be in the form of a male displaying his apparent power over women (e.g. Raymond Sintè in *The Outsider*), or Ida's shallow knowledge of 'what's right', or the rigid and banal framework of the Oranians' 'safe' and 'life-effacing habits'.*

We find a very similar idea in an essay by Greene on the life of the 'spoiled priest', Frederick Rolfe, where he quotes T S Eliot:

> Most people are only a very little alive; and to awaken them to the spiritual is a very great responsibility: it is only when they are so awakened that they are capable of real Good, but at the same time they become first capable of Evil.[8]

Of course, Eliot may be taking too much for granted here: we may wonder whether

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* Interestingly, Camus seems to have felt in much the same way about the actual citizens of Oran, as about their fictional counterparts. In his essay, 'The Minotaur, or the Stop in Oran', he describes how a cinema owner has to indulge in wild exaggeration in his advertising, in order to get the people interested in the film which he is showing: 'It is essential to overcome the indifference and profound apathy felt in [Oran] the moment there is any question of choosing between two shows, two careers and often, even, two women. People make up their minds only when forced to do so.'[7]

Ida or The Oranians *could* be 'awakened' in this sense by any external agency, and, if so, whose responsibility it would be to do so? Would such a forced awakening be itself a denial of their liberty? Or can such an awakening come only from an existential communion with the spiritual dimension of the self? Simone Weil, a writer much admired by Camus* seems to suggest that the latter is the case; in a letter to a priest concerning her own spiritual development she writes:

> You neither brought me to the Christian inspiration nor did you bring me to Christ ... it had been done without the intervention of any human being ... I should have received nothing from you ... for I should have been afraid of the possibility of error and illusion which human influence in the divine order is likely to involve.[9]

We may say that such ideas have existential and also secular relevance: it seems that we may *help* others to achieve their potential, perhaps in the way that Dr Rieux, like Weil's priest, helps his fellow man by keeping him healthy, but humans must find fulfilment *within* themselves, and *for* themselves, otherwise the notions of freedom and responsibility become meaningless.

Greene seems to be suggesting that, by denying or ignoring the concept of good and evil, Ida and her like are denying the possibility of good, both in the sense that the idea of good would be meaningless without the opposite idea of evil, and that the *possibility* of good would simply not exist without the *possibility* of evil: we must

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* It is interesting to note that the apparently atheistic Camus was extremely enthusiastic about the writings of the intensely spiritual Simone Weil. He edited and published some of her works, including her last book, *Supernatural Knowledge*, and is quoted as describing her as 'the only great spirit of our time.'[10]

have both or neither.** Perhaps we can see this idea reflected in the way that Rose, as Pinkie's evil nature is gradually revealed to her, deliberately decides to remain faithful to him as an act of her own apparently free will. She believes that Ida's notions of legality or 'knowing what's right' are empty and meaningless when confronted with the eternal values of true human spirituality: '[Rose] knew by tests as clear as mathematics that Pinkie was evil – what did it matter in that case whether he was right or wrong?' (BR 199). It might be said that, from the perspective of Rose's own goodness, it is Pinkie's very capacity for evil which makes him more like her than someone like Ida could ever be. Perhaps Greene gives us a clue to this notion in the choice of their names: Pink and Rose are two different words, but they are usually used to describe the same colour.

Yet surely, despite her goodness, through her faithfulness and her support of Pinkie she actually becomes an accomplice in his crimes. Is there some sense in which Greene wants us to see that the good in Rose needs the evil in Pinkie? Or is it that Rose would rather be damned together with Pinkie than stand alone before God. In his novel, *The Ministry of Fear,* Greene seems to answer this question through the words of another of his characters:

> Wasn't it better to take part even in the crimes of people you loved ... and if that were the end of everything suffer damnation with them, rather than be saved alone?[11]

**We may see a connection here with Father Paneloux's notion of 'all or nothing' in his second sermon. The sense in which Paneloux is speaking is that of either total acceptance of God's will or total rejection; we no half-measures, as it were. We need to remember, however, that Paneloux, in speaking of total acceptance, is very much in The Augustinian tradition of accepting that God could use even the suffering of a child for some greater purpose: 'The suffering of children were our bread of affliction, but without this bread our souls would die of spiritual hunger' (PL 185) From this perspective, we might see that Paneloux's 'all' as total acceptance of God's will means accepting good *and* evil, while his 'nothing' would mean total rejection which could take the form of indifference. This reading of Paneloux might just allow his 'all or nothing' to be squeezed into Kierkegaard's 'either/or', but it wouldn't really stand when we remember that, for Kierkegaard, when we choose good *and* evil we choose *all* evil, not just evil acts used by God for the furtherance of future goals – a concept, anyway, which Kierkegaard would have rejected totally.

Pinkie, of course, can have no real idea of faithfulness toward Rose, yet there does appear to be some rudimentary stirring of feeling in him, even if it is destined ultimately to amount to nothing. When Ida has Rose cornered in her bedroom at Snow's, Pinkie arrives in time to 'rescue' her with the words: 'What are you worrying my girl about?'; words which seem to have overtones of possession, even tenderness. Allot and Farris write: 'Through [such] rudimentary gestures of tenderness an impression is imparted to the reader that, if there were any clear hope of salvation for Pinkie, it would come through his relationship with Rose.'[12] The Boy suddenly seems to realise this in a confused way; he begins to feel that he has some sort of deeply felt need of Rose, as if the darkness in his soul can only exist as a shadow around the light of her unselfishness:

> He was aware that she belonged to his life like a room or a chair: she was something which completed him ... What was most evil in him needed her: it couldn't get along without goodness (BR 126).

We find something similar in *The Plague,* in the way that the self-seeking criminal, Cottard, seeks out the company of Grand, a man who feels that 'one's got to help a neighbour hasn't one?' (PL 19). The man who, as we have seen, seems to Dr Rieux to be so closely allied to the plague that 'in the intervals of his breathing he seemed to hear the little squeals of rats' (see above p57), is contrasted with the man who, without hesitation, and 'with the large-heartedness that was second nature to him' (PL 112), agrees to serve in the sanitary squads whose very purpose is to fight the disease.

Returning to *Brighton Rock*: after their confrontation with Ida, Pinkie and Rose are finally left alone, and Greene seems to allow us a glimpse of something approaching to transcendental love when he writes:

> Good or evil lived in the same country, spoke the same language, came together like old friends, feeling the same completion, touching hands beside the iron bedstead (BR p127).

Yet it is ironic that despite their love, which Greene apparently wants us to see as more spiritual than Ida's relationships, they can allow evil to flourish in a way that Ida never could. This is even more striking when we compare the paucity of Ida's 'easygoing' relationships with the various men in her life. She sits in the 'Pompadour boudoir' at the Cosmopolitan hotel with the nervous Phil Corkery, and contemplates the coming night of lust which will prove to be so mediocre. She discusses Fred Hale and her ex-husband, Tom, with Phil as she bites 'into an éclair and the cream [spurts] between the large front teeth' (BR p144). The crass image seems to negate any possibility here of genuine human sympathy or understanding, or of any feeling beyond the most shallow sensuality.

From this perspective, we seem to be led to the strange conclusion that Pinkie, the vicious gangster, may be leading a more authentic existence than Ida, who apparently wants to harm no-one. Surely it is an absurdity to claim that Pinkie can be authentically evil? Yet Greene, again writing on the 'fallen' Frederick Rolfe, seems to be suggesting that those who have chosen evil are somehow more alive than those who have 'chosen not to choose' to paraphrase Sartre,* or chosen not to 'will' for Kierkegaard. Comparing Rolfe's life to that of such 'ordinary men' who had not committed evil, he might equally well be comparing Pinkie to Ida:

> They [the 'ordinary men'] beckon and speak like figures on the other side of a distorting glass pane. They have quite a different reality, a much thinner reality, they are not concerned with eternal damnation.[13]

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* Sartre actually wrote: 'In one sense choice is possible, but what is not possible is not to choose. I can always choose, but I must know that if I do not choose, that is still a choice.'[14]

Yet, can we really say that Ida's existence consists in a 'thinner reality' than that of Pinkie? In his rejection of goodness, the boy must realise that he has rejected not only the Church and all its teachings, which he believes to be the only source of spirituality, but has become an outcast from society itself. Looked at in this way, surely Ida's commitment to 'what's right', no matter how shallow Greene may see this as being, at least allows her to connect with reality in context of the society in which she lives in a way that Pinkie never can.

We have seen in chapter II how both Pinkie and Raven (in *A Gun for Sale*) have been so badly damaged by the nature of their childhood that they are incapable of believing that good can ever exist. Hell is a reality for Pinkie and Raven, because their lives have been so devoid of love or happiness, that each seems to feel that they are in Hell already. For Rose, however, the reality of Hell is something to be contrasted with the reality of Heaven, both of which represent real alternatives for the future destiny of both her and Pinkie. She does not just drift, inauthentically, into a sort of Hell on earth; she is aware of the possibility of damnation *and* salvation. We have seen how she consciously chooses to remain faithful to Pinkie even so far as the ultimate sacrifice of her very soul: 'she was going to show them that they couldn't damn him without damning her too. ... she wouldn't let him go into that darkness alone.' (see above p33) Rose is prepared, therefore, to make the deliberate choice of sharing an exile from salvation alongside Pinkie, rather than betray the love which she feels for him. Towards the end of the novel, and after Pinkie's death, Rose confesses to a priest and receives some unexpected words of comfort that seem to confirm the moral depth of her love for Pinkie. The priest tells her that:

> There was a man, a Frenchman ... a holy man ... and he lived in sin all through his life ... who had the same idea as you ... this man decided that if any soul was

> going to be damned, he would be damned too. He never took the sacraments. He never married his wife in church ... some people think he was – well, a saint (BR p246).*

Perhaps there is hope for Rose, however, even though she has apparently chosen to defy God and align herself with Pinkie, because her choice has its roots in the 'depths of her fidelity', grounded in the perspective of a love which can see a real human being in all its potential for good and evil. Simone Weil wrote that 'in my eyes Christianity [in the form of the Catholic church] is catholic by right but not in fact. So many things are outside it ... so many things that God loves'.[16] We might count fidelity and love among those 'things which God loves', so that, although Rose has exiled herself from the church by her choices, we might argue that she is not really defying God at all, but asserting her personal existence by authentically questioning the validity of established dogma.

However, this does not, of course, mean that Pinkie, the object of her devotion, is worthy of what the priest goes on to describe as the 'appalling ... strangeness of God's mercy' (BR 246). We can see this very clearly when, at the very end of the novel, Rose is returning, comforted, from her visit to the priest. It seems that she may be pregnant with Pinkie's child, and now, perhaps for the first time, she feels some sort of real hope for the future. She remembers that Pinkie made a recording for her in a record booth on the pier, a record which she has never been able to play, so that she heads toward 'Frank's' to retrieve the record containing what she thinks will be a message of love: 'a message to her: if there was a child, speaking to the child' (BR 247). But, of course she is mistaken. The message was recorded just after they had

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* It seems likely that Camus himself read and was impressed by this section of Greene's novel; in his notebooks he writes, almost in Greene's words: 'A man (a Frenchman?), a holy man who has lived his whole life in sin (never partaking in communion, not marrying the woman with whom he lived) because, unable to endure the idea that a single soul was damned, he wanted to be damned too.[15]

had the appalling and degrading interview with her parents in Nelson place, and Pinkie's bitter resentment at being tied forever to the scene of his childhood deprivation drives him to record, unheard by Rose, the desperate and bitterly venomous words: 'God damn you, you little bitch, why can't you go back home forever and let me be' (BR 177). Greene chillingly describes, in the last line of the book, how 'She walked rapidly in the thin June sunlight towards the worst horror of all' (BR 247.) We can only guess at Rose's reaction to this 'horror', but the unalterable fact of Pinkie's choice of evil cannot in any way alter the integrity and authenticity which she has displayed throughout her confrontation with life, and perhaps we may be allowed to hope (if I may be allowed to speak of her as if she were a real person) that her spirit will be sufficiently strong to enable her to sustain the love that may make possible the redemption of their child.

We can see that the supposed authenticity of Pinkie's choices which we speculated on above is an illusion. He doesn't have to resist the temptations which fill Ida's life, because they hold no allure for him. He therefore gets no credit for his choices in this respect: he is revolted by sex, and has no desire for smoking, drinking and the rest. Greene doesn't seem to want us to admire these traits in Pinkie, but rather to see them as evidence of the Boy's lack of human feeling, as he finds his pleasure in far worse pursuits. Yet, as Atkins comments, 'it is difficult to read Greene's fiction without sensing a contempt for sinlessness.'[17] As we have seen, Pinkie's appreciation of physical pleasure has been distorted into a crude sadism far more damaging than Ida's 'bit of fun'. He *does* have something, however, a sort of rudimentary spirituality, stunted perhaps but which sometimes does seem to put him on higher level of awareness than Ida; but this awareness is so distorted and clouded

that he can only briefly glimpse the possibility of anything other than the disgust which he feels for the lives of those around him. Perhaps even Ida, in some vague way, feels that her dissatisfaction is a sign that there is really something more to life; perhaps she faintly hears some echo from a reality which is just out of reach, but it is to the planchette which she ultimately turns for her ersatz spirituality.

At certain times Pinkie does become aware of these latent feelings within himself which might have led him to choose something other than his vicious way of life, but they never seem to have enough power to move him. Towards the end of the novel, for instance, as he is about to get Rose to commit suicide in their bogus pact, he experiences such a moment: 'he had a sense that somewhere, like a beggar outside a shuttered house, tenderness stirred, but he was bound in a habit of hate' (BR p231).

Is Pinkie really unable to lift himself out of his vicious lifestyle? It would seem that he has chosen evil as opposed to good, but it might be more accurate to say, certainly from the point of view of Kierkegaard's either/or, that, by rejecting human and ethical values in general, he has not really chosen at all. Rather than actually choosing evil, he has chosen a nothingness of inauthenticity, laying himself open to external forces of evil against which he has no internal ethical resources for protection. As we have seen, part of this negation of his own existence seems to lie in his rejection of the reality of the existence of others. We can glimpse this narcissistic dimension to his psyche when he visits the decrepit solicitor Prewitt in order to persuade him to leave the country. Pinkie finds him drunk and in a strange mood of confession which startles the Boy; Prewitt has never been anything more than any of the other objects in the world around him of which he makes use occasionally, but suddenly the inanimate object begins to live:

> He had never known Prewitt like this before: it was a frightening and entrancing exhibition. A man was coming alive before his eyes: he could see the nerves set to work in the agonised flesh, thought bloom in the transparent brain (BR 210).

Pinkie is appalled by this sudden glimpse into the hell of another, and returns to the dark safety of his own room at Frank's, only to find there, as we have discussed earlier, '*his* enemy', Rose, who has 'swept ... and tidied' so that 'it was her Hell now ... he felt driven out' (BR 213). It would seem that the Boy is an exile not only from the society of 'decent innocent people', but also from his own Hell on earth which he had thought of as not 'so bad'. Camus wrote of a similar feeling of being unable to find a refuge in a once familiar 'dark room':

> My home is neither here nor elsewhere. And the world has become merely an unknown landscape where my heart can lean on nothing. Foreign – who can know what this word means.[18]

(The French word for 'foreign' is *étranger*; so perhaps the original French title of *The Outsider – L'Étranger*, can lead us to associate this feeling with Camus' conception of Meursault, as well as with the more obvious idea of the Absurd). We seem to sense a similar feeling of estrangement as Pinkie sees the once familiar objects in his room as suddenly alien; as things to which he can no longer feel any connection.

Pinkie is apparently lost in an 'absurd' void somewhere between Kierkegaard's notion of the 'aesthetic' or sensual existence, as personified by Ida, and the higher, 'ethical' level which Rose has chosen, both of which seem equally foreign to him, so that his 'home is neither here nor elsewhere'. Again, we might say that his inability to recognise the reality of the existence of others is the root of this alienation; the paradox here is that his self-centred imagination is what really separates him from himself. Kierkegaard has famously claimed that 'truth is subjectivity',[19] meaning that it is impossible to lucidly confront the truth of existence without an authentic

confrontation with the subjective self. This only becomes possible, however, against the existential presence of the 'other'. Sartre referred to this as 'intersubjectivity';[20] man must transcend the self in order to find or rather to create the self:

> ... it is in projecting and losing himself that he makes man to exist ... and ... it is by pursuing transcendent aims that he himself is able to exist. ... There is no other universe except the human universe, the universe of human subjectivity ... in such a sense that man is not shut up in himself but forever present in a human universe.[21]

For Sartre, every man and woman is free to achieve this existential transcendence, and, as we have seen, he states that anyone who tries to 'hide from this total freedom ... with deterministic excuses, I shall call cowards.'[22] Yet perhaps there is another explanation, which allows that the likes of Pinkie may *not* have the freedom to authentically confront existence, at least not without the help of others; this is the Freudian explanation, which Sartre detested in that it gave what he saw as a possible excuse for 'cowards' who were afraid to confront life. It may be, however, that the addition of a Freudian perspective to our viewpoint may make possible a deeper understanding of Pinkie's psychology and his apparent inability to realise any sort of ethical level of understanding.

Freud's concept of the development of the self seems to harmonise, at least initially, quite well with existentialist ideas. Pamela Thurschwell explains Freud's notion of the 'Id' and the 'Ego':

> When a child is firstborn it is a mass of **id**, an amorphous unstructured set of desires; the demand 'I want' is the sum total of its mind's contents. Out of these primal desires an **ego** quickly begins to emerge. One definition of the **ego** is the individual's image of himself as a self-conscious being ... separate from the world around him.[23]

The individual, at this initial stage of development is concerned only with itself; it is its own 'love object' which it wishes to preserve. It is the ego which is the rational

dimension of the self; the part which is able to postpone simple gratification in order to preserve the self, which it loves, in its dealings with reality. Freud saw this narcissistic stage as perfectly healthy phase of development, provided that 'eventually a person would transfer his love for himself to another object ... usually ... one of the parents'.[24] So far, Sartre would probably agree, in the sense that the transfer of love can be seen as the first stage in the transcendence of the self and the realisation of the intersubjective 'other', but, for Freud, circumstances might prevent this: perhaps abusive or indifferent parents, or abuse in a children's home etc., resulting in a psychopathic* condition of which the subject may be unaware:

> ... if a person never transfers his love to another, original healthy narcissism can lead to severe psychic distress along the lines of psychosis. A delusional sense of one's own importance ... and a paranoid feeling of always being watched are ... symptoms of narcissistic psychotic disorders. In the severest narcissistic states the patient finds it impossible to engage with other human beings at all; he has no sense that anyone can exist outside his own mind.[25]

Pinkie, as a child, became disgusted with his parents as they performed sex acts in the same bedroom as their child: 'the frightening weekly exercise ... which he watched from his single bed' (BR 90). In the case of Raven in *A Gun for Sale,* we have examined how his mother's suicide and the abuse which he suffered at the children's home probably had an even worse effect on his childhood (see above p152). It is easy to see, therefore, that Pinkie might well have been incapable of transferring his love to either parent in the squalid conditions of 'Nelson Place'. If we accept that the Freudian explanation is appropriate in this case, then it must follow that both Pinkie's and Raven's capacity for empathy with their fellow humans has been left almost totally undeveloped: without the 'transference' of loving feelings in

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* The word 'psychopathic' has been, in recent diagnoses, largely superseded by the term 'neurotic'. (Hilgard, p493) This is the term used by Murdoch on p93.

childhood, it would seem almost impossible for them to give or receive such feelings as young adults, so that the possibility of authentic choice never comes within their reach.

Pinkie's 'delusional sense of [his] own importance' is apparent in several places in the novel; a good example can be found where he takes Spicer's ex-girlfriend, Sylvie, out to the car park at the 'Queen of Hearts' roadhouse, in order to perform what will turn out to be an abortive act of fornication. Pinkie is about to get into a car with the girl when, quite suddenly it seems, 'the darkness peeled away between him and the fair and vacuous face' (BR p134). Once again a human being is coming to life before him, but he quickly rejects this threat to his solipsistic existence. He masks the 'hideous and commonplace act' which he is about to perform with an improvised fantasy of a glorious future, when his true 'importance' will be finally recognised:

> ...he was at the beginning of a long polished parquet walk, there were busts of great men and the sound of cheering, Mr Colleoni bowed like a shop walker, stepping backwards, an army of razors was at his back: a conqueror (BR 135).

Of course the image is quickly dispelled when Sylvie says to him, 'You've got the doings, haven't you?' The boy runs away in fear, horror and bitterness.

Freud suggests that, after the ego has come into existence, a third dimension to the psyche is possible, that of the 'superego':

> The third part of the personality is the **superego**, which judges whether actions are right or wrong ... the superego is the internalised representation of the values and morals of society and comprises the individual's conscience as well as his or her image of the morally ideal person.[26]

Sartre, of course, would reject this on the basis that the 'values and morals of society' cannot form the basis of 'authentic' choosing. Yet we need to clearly understand the moral ideas of our time in order to decide if we agree with them or not. Sartre sometimes seems to be suggesting that we have to choose in a moral vacuum; but,

surely, choosing to conform to the ideas of society can be validly authentic, provided we have really examined these ideas and decided that they are morally right. After all, without a variety of possible choices, how can the act of choosing, authentically or otherwise, be possible at all?

Yet we are still, it seems, at the level of 'right or wrong'; perhaps this type of psychological analysis can say nothing about the concept of good and evil. Or are we in danger of confusing the two concepts here? After all, the 'individual conscience' is what normally guides us in matters of good and evil. Let us take an example: when an agent deprives someone of their money in some shady yet legal business deal, the law can do nothing, it is only the conscience of the agent which can be appealed to. Such an appeal must be on lines similar to 'you have done wrong to that person in that you have caused him deliberate harm.' I suggest that 'wrong' in this context is the exact equivalent of 'evil'. In this sense, it is Freud's superego which allows us to understand the concept of good and evil. In the case of Pinkie, he seems to be without a 'personal conscience' so that, although he has had sufficient religious education to be aware of the terms good and evil, his personality has not developed to the level of the superego, so that, if we accept Freud's picture of the psyche, he can have no real understanding of either right and wrong or good and evil.

Knowledge of both good and evil is an absolute prerequisite of our freedom to choose between them. A rejection of this choice may be seen as a refusal to confront, not only the reality of good and evil within ourselves, but also the reality of *all* good and evil, so that we are left with no resources with which to identify with external good or to fight external evil, neither of which can be engaged with as real possibilities for choice.

In 2004, international shock was expressed at the success of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the extreme right wing politician, in the first round of the French presidential elections. Although it was never seriously thought that a Nazi in all but name could actually become the president of France, the level of his support expressed as a percentage of the vote (21% in some opinion polls) caused real consternation across Europe. The French voters seemed to be suffering from a period of frustration with their mainstream politicians in the form of the conservative President Jacques Chirac and, especially, the socialist Lionel Jospin. Consequently, they either decided not to bother to vote at all, or allowed themselves to become 'convinced that Jean-Marie Le Pen is a plausible man',[27] despite the views of his hard core supporters who claimed that:

> We do not accept that the murder of millions of Jews was a crime against humanity. We do not believe that the Vichy government that collaborated with the Nazis betrayed France.[28]

Similarly in Britain, the British National Party, another extreme right organisation, has, in the last few years, gained council seats in parts of the North of England. Perhaps those voters who have supported the neo Nazis, despite the horrific and vivid lessons of twentieth century history, have also failed, like Pinkie, to reach an understanding of good and evil.

As for the voters of Britain and France who refused or just failed to vote: we might argue that, by doing nothing, they are not only rejecting both good and evil, but throwing away their chance to engage in the community in which they live, like the immature Rambert in *The Plague*. It is to be hoped that, like Rambert, they will come to realise that the plague of neo-Nazism is 'everyone's business', and that evil cannot

be fought except by a committed engagement with life, which must involve a clear and lucid choice to confront both good and evil as real possibilities.

5. ABSURD CHOICES

A concept which underlies a great deal of Camus' early work is that of the 'Absurd', although at the time of writing *The Plague* he was moving away from the absurd toward the concept of 'revolt'. Nevertheless, the ideas contained in Camus' notion of the absurd inform his later work to such an extent that we will undertake a brief exploration of the idea as it was understood by him. The absurd may be seen as a consequence of atheism; Camus writes in the *Myth of Sisyphus*:

> A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.[1]

What he is actually saying is that man has, for a long time, been deceiving himself by imagining that the universe has meaning or purpose, either theologically or historically. Religion, for instance, has provided humans with a comfortable shield between themselves and reality which has allowed them to abnegate their own responsibility, resigning themselves to fate under such smokescreens as 'God's will' or 'my destiny' etc. For Camus, man must realise, not only that there is no God and consequently no heaven or 'promised land', but that there never *has been* a God, so that there can be no 'lost home' to remember, no 'golden age' to which we might return. Friedrich Nietzsche, who was a great influence on Camus, famously wrote that 'God is dead.'[2] This is not to suggest that God was once alive, but that, as for Camus, it is the illusion of God which has died in the mind of man. The realisation of this can cause man to feel that the world around him which he thought he knew, has suddenly become a strange land, devoid of reality, over which he has no power of control, and that there is no possibility of finding any meaning except within himself.

It seems that we need to see Camus' 'absurd' as a form of alienation, taking the form of a 'divorce between man and his life'. To accept the absurdity of existence is to accept that one must become an exile, a 'stranger' (étranger): within the world yet not part of the world. Perhaps such an exile, or realisation of such an exile, is a necessary withdrawal, a step back away from life in order to see it clearly for the first time, and that only this can make possible a subsequent 'engagement'. We might say that man is, originally, *entangled in,* rather than *engaged with* life, especially in the form of the society in which he lives; this *entanglement* would involve living 'inauthentically': 'going with the flow' (to use an expression popular in the 60s): caught up, unreflectively, in the ideas and dogma of society. The consciousness of this 'absurd' separation therefore becomes essential in order that a human may fully experience his individual existence, and it is only in this way that a real engagement with society is made possible.

Another aspect of 'absurdity' is that man is constantly driven to search outside himself for some sort of meaning, while, if he were courageous enough to face the truth, he would have to confront the fact of his total 'abandonment' (to use Sartre's term) in an indifferent universe, and realise, with a sense of awe, the true extent of his own freedom, responsibility and aloneness. Yet man cannot seem to ignore this outward drive, this attempt to find a meaning where, for Camus and Sartre, there is none. We are left with a strange, 'absurd' notion of man driven to seek for a meaning and purpose which simply doesn't exist.

For Camus, as well as for Sartre, there is no possibility of finding hope in a meaningless world, and further, that anyone who tries to pretend that it *is* possible is actually betraying the authenticity of his own existence. Camus suggests that it is

inherent in the nature of man to continually and absurdly seek for this meaning, yet Sartre actually goes so far as to deny that man has any nature at all. He draws this conclusion from the idea that, since there is 'no human nature because there is no God to have a conception of it ... Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself'.[3] There can be no meaning, therefore, except the meaning which man himself gives to his own life by means of his authentic choices. (Although, how this could be achieved without some sort of innate, rational human nature, or at least the innate potential for rational thought which must form the basis for authentic choosing, is not explained). Sartre quotes Dostoyevsky's Alyosha Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov*: 'If God did not exist, everything would be permitted',[4] of course, what Alyosha meant was that there would be a break-down of morality: a slide into anarchy without the spiritual values which hold society together. For Sartre, however, this is the 'starting point' for existentialism; without God, man is 'without excuse', we are not 'provided with any values or commands that could legitimise our behaviour'.[5] But man is also without 'hope'. Sartre claims that 'one need not hope in order to undertake one's work,'[6] but that one can 'create' a worthwhile existence here and now by the exercise of authentic choices.

Camus has a similar view of those who hold to what he regards as the illusion of 'hope', albeit in a rather more specialised context:

> [the] Hope of another life one must 'deserve' or [the] trickery of those who live, not for life itself, but for some great idea that will transcend it [life that is], refine it, give it a meaning, and [thus] betray it.[7]

Sartre, as we might expect, expressed the idea rather more bluntly and dramatically: man is 'condemned to be free' despite the dogma of religion and the false hope which it engenders; free in the sense of being without God, without hope, and with 'no excuses':

> Those who hide from this total freedom ... with deterministic excuses, I shall call cowards [see above p110]. Others, who try to show that their existence is necessary, when it is merely an accident ... I shall call scum.[8]

The idea that life is worth living even though there is no hope of finding meaning or purpose is fundamental to Camus' worldview. There comes a moment in everyone's life, he suggests, when the world is suddenly revealed in all its absurdity. The 'mechanical aspect' of our gestures, the 'meaningless pantomime makes silly everything that surrounds [us] ... this incalculable tumble before the image of what we are, this 'nausea' as a writer of today puts it',[9] (referring to Sartre's novel, *Nausea*) all tend to force us to look at ourselves, our lives, and question the very existence of a self with which we can identify. Who is that 'stranger who at certain seconds comes to meet us in a mirror, the familiar yet alarming brother we encounter in our own photographs'?[10] The realisation that this absurd person is, in fact, ourselves can be an existential shock, causing us to experience the vertigo or 'nausea' inseparable from a true acceptance of our 'abandonment', experienced as a feeling of alienation from all that we took for granted as familiar. Yet, at the same time, we must realise that the image in the photograph is how we are perceived by others, so that, to them, *we* are the 'other' on which *their* existence depends and from which *they* feel alienated. If we are courageous enough to follow the consequences of our 'revelation', then this should engender in us a genuine passion for the life which we are living now, stripped of all the illusions which would undermine its value. Any attempt to understand is futile, or, even worse, degrading to man's intellect, because there is no meaning to be understood, just a life to be lived.

If we do not have the courage to face up to this realisation of the absurd, the alternative can only be to either lose ourselves in illusions and self-deceptions, or to

indulge in nihilistic despair and the possibility of suicide. Perhaps Camus was remembering his reading of Augustine – for whom despair is the only unforgivable sin – when he wrote: 'He who despairs of events is a coward, but he who has hope for the human lot is a fool.'[11] It is, therefore, the man who can avoid both despair and hope who is able to achieve a truly authentic confrontation with an absurd existence.

Returning to Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, we find the idea of rejecting any possibility of rational understanding while yet confronting the facts of existence expressed by Alyosha's brother, Ivan. Camus was extremely familiar with the work, having, in 1937, actually staged a production based on Jacques Copeau's adaptation of the novel, with his company, 'Théâtre de l'Equipe', in which Camus himself played the character of Ivan Karamazov.[12] Ivan describes, to his younger brother Alyosha who is a noviciate priest, the unspeakable cruelties practiced by some men upon innocent children. Alyosha murmurs that such people should be shot, then feels that 'What I said was absurd, but …' when his brother interrupts:

> "That's just the point that 'but'!" cried Ivan. "Let me tell you, novice, that the absurd is only too necessary on earth. The world stands on absurdities … I understand nothing … I don't want to understand anything now. I want to stick to the facts. If I try to understand anything, I will be false to the facts …"[13]

Camus himself echoes this empirical position when he writes:

> This heart within me I can feel, and I judge that it exists. This world I can touch and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge, and the rest is construction.[14]

For Camus, any attempt to get beyond this position is not only futile but constitutes what he referred to as 'philosophical suicide.'[15] By this strange phrase he meant what he saw as the sacrifice of the intellect in a useless quest for meaning. To avoid being 'false to the facts', one must recognise the limitations of reason and apply it authentically to the problems of living this life, where it can have real value: 'if I

recognise the limits of reason, I do not therefore negate it'.[16] (We will later see that Camus was not entirely consistent in this area). Hope, therefore, leads to philosophical suicide and despair to physical suicide.

The consequence of this is that not only do we not expect any sort of divine help in dealing with our lives, but we also cease to look beyond our experience as a basis for our rationality. In *The Plague,* Jean Tarrou asks Dr Rieux why he shows such single-minded devotion to his fight against the disease, 'considering that you don't believe in God' (Pl 106). Rieux replies that 'if he believed in an all-powerful God he would cease curing the sick and leave that to Him.' This would be the ultimate in self-delusion for Camus: to deny one's total responsibility not only for oneself, but also for the world in which the self finds its existence. We must do our work here and now, without looking towards some future Utopia or some divine help and guidance, because this is the only way to engage fully with life and live it to the full. If we find that the world is absurd, then the world *is* absurd; there is no other reality from which it can find redemption from this condition.

Dr Rieux continues the conversation with Tarrou:

> "I have no idea what's awaiting me, or what will happen when all this ends. For the moment I know this; there are sick people and they need curing ... I defend them as best I can, that's all."
> "Against whom?" [asks Tarrou]
> "I haven't a notion ..." (PL 107).

Rieux, therefore, might be the very embodiment of Camus' authentic individual, taking full responsibility for his own life choices, fully engaged with his society without judgement or illusions, and calling on no one to help except the people around him that he can see and touch. He continues to defend humanity while refusing to speculate 'against whom' he is so doing, because any such speculation would

necessarily take him beyond the empirical, which Camus claims to be the 'end of knowledge'. The only hope which he holds to is the hope of doing something to help mankind *now*. When Tarrou suggests that 'your victories will never be lasting', Rieux replies 'Yes, I know that. But it's no reason for giving up the struggle', even though this must mean, in Rieux's own words, 'A never-ending defeat.' (PL p108) Yet, if he is fully engaged with the present, any victory which he may gain over disease or suffering cannot be made less by the fact that it may only be temporary, for his success is in the present which, by definition, does not exist into the future where victory might become defeat.

Nevertheless, it seems that Camus may not have been quite as clear about this as he might at first seem to be. In 1955, Lottman tells us that Camus wrote to a friend admitting the powerful influence of 'Pascal, Tolstoy and Nietzsche':

> This choice will seem strange to you, and I myself agree that they don't go together. To tell the truth I haven't managed to work out my own internal contradictions.[17]

Of course Camus was, as we have noticed, moving away from the concept of the absurd toward that of rebellion, and this may account for his 'internal contradictions.' Bearing this in mind, Rieux becomes not just an authentic individual but an authentic rebel, an idea which we will examine in chapter seven.

Camus' admiration for Tolstoy seems to have been profound: Todd tells us that three photographs were noticed by visitors to his office where he worked in 1956: his mother, Nietzsche and Tolstoy,[18] and we are told that he thought of his work *Le Premiere Homme* as his 'Tolstoyan Novel'.[19] It seems difficult, however, to reconcile

his ideas of man's 'abandonment' in a meaningless universe with Tolstoy's totally unambiguous statement that:

> Every religion is the establishment of a relationship between man and the infinite Being of which he feels he is a part, and from which he derives guidance in his conduct.[20]

And further that:

> ... religion remains the chief motivator and heart of human societies. Without it, as without a heart, there cannot be rational life.[21]

For Tolstoy, therefore, as opposed to Sartre, man not only has a rational nature which is made manifest in the society which he constructs, but man's very existence has its roots in religion; in the 'infinite Being' (we may wonder to which of Sartre's categories of 'cowards' or 'scum' Tolstoy has condemned himself with such absurd 'delusions'!). The concept of man as part of a 'supreme Being', might lead us to see man's existence as a temporary individuation of himself from the divine 'one', whence man gets all his idea of morality, and to which all beings eventually return. Tolstoy wrote that:

> The life of man has a divine origin ... therefore man must serve this Source of all human life ... and therefore, he who lives by love, now, in the present, becomes, through the common life of all men, at one with the Father, the source the foundation of all life.[22]

We can see that, stripped of its religious content (which, of course, Tolstoy would have seen as taking away its fundamental value) the concept of 'living by love, now, in the present' would describe Rieux's worldview, and may be one of the aspects of Tolstoy's thought which appealed so much to Camus.

Greene allows us an alternative glimpse of the One, (not entirely devoid of irony), when Ida Arnold attends the cremation of Fred Hale. The clergyman at the crematorium delivers a sermon in which he tells the tiny congregation that:

> '... we believe that our brother is already at one with the One ... He has attained unity. We do not know what that One is with whom (or with which) he is now at one ... [but he has been] reabsorbed in the universal spirit.' He touched a little buzzer, the New Art doors opened, the flames flapped and the coffin slid smoothly down into the fiery sea ...[he] smiled ... like a conjuror who has produced his nine hundred and fortieth rabbit without a hitch (BR p35).

Of course, such a flabby example of what might pass for religion in the eyes of some cannot really be compared with the integrity of Tolstoy's vision, so that we can hardly blame Ida when, after meditating on possible retribution for Hale's murder, she concludes 'If you believed in God, you might leave vengeance to him, but you couldn't trust the One, the universal spirit. Vengeance was Ida's ...' .BR p37) We may compare her words with those of Dr Rieux quoted above when he says that if he believed in God he would leave curing the sick to Him. Rieux seems to be displaying some degree of faith in the idea that what he is doing is worthwhile in an altruistic sense. Interestingly, he claims to defend his patients from something which he cannot define, and which therefore does not seem to be the plague itself, but perhaps some more metaphysical menace. He does not even deny the possibility of some sort of sequel to his physical existence when he says that he has no idea what will happen to him 'when all this ends.' Ida, however, is in no doubt about the situation:

> Let Papists treat death with flippancy: life wasn't so important to them as what came after: but to her death was the end of everything. At one with the One – it didn't mean a thing beside a glass of Guinness on a sunny day (BR 36).

If we consider this from Camus' atheistic viewpoint, we seem to have an interesting paradox in that it is Ida who is quite definite that death is the end of everything, while Dr Rieux is not so sure, so that, at a first glance, it might seem that Ida is more in tune with Camus' absurd than the doctor. Her credo of, 'I know what's right', is firmly rooted in the life around her. Yet, although she doesn't believe in God or religion, Camus might say that she evades the absurd through her belief in 'ghosts, [although]

you couldn't call that thin transparent existence life eternal' (BR p...). She vaguely feels that she is heading eventually for oblivion, and so, like so many others, undermines her authenticity by living her life within a cloud of alcohol and fornication which she knows by experience will bring her no real joy.

Camus sometimes seems to deny the validity of a broad, metaphysical vision of existence, while at other times he apparently suggests something rather different. We live absurdly, he says, 'In a universe ... divested of illusions', and without hope or meaning, yet elsewhere he speaks movingly of the disenfranchised and alienated in society:

> ... who are humiliated and debased. They need to hope, and if we all keep silent ... they will be forever deprived of hope and we with them.[23]

So hope is no longer excluded from the world, if not for ourselves than perhaps for our children, as long as it really is *this* world and not the next. It is something that we can feel and experience while yet living an authentic existence: we can engage with the world with Heidegger's 'care and concern' by refusing to keep quiet about social injustice in the present, and to hope for something better for mankind, while at the same time realising that it may not be achieved in the foreseeable future.

Graham Greene, in an interview with Mario Couto in 1988, discusses the necessity of doubt in order for faith to exist. He quotes Camus as stating that 'Christianity is pessimistic about man and is optimistic about human destiny.'[24] Yet this notion of Christianity hardly seems to go well with the ideas of Father Paneloux when he asks the question, 'who would dare to assert that eternal happiness can compensate for a single moment's human suffering?' (PL 183). Paneloux admits his doubt concerning the possibility of reward in an afterlife by saying that 'to tell the truth, he knew nothing about it'. The hope implicit in the what priest is saying is inseparable from the

idea of faith, and seems to agree rather well with Dr Rieux's admittedly ironic yet nonetheless pertinent question,

> ... mightn't it be better for God if we refuse to believe in Him, and struggle with all our might against death, without raising our eyes towards the heaven where he sits in silence? (PL 108).

It seems that both Paneloux and Rieux are using the language of faith: faith in the idea that what they are doing – what mankind is doing – is somehow worthwhile, whether or not there is some future paradise for those who have suffered. Greene, in the same interview, goes on to contrast his own position with that of Camus:

> I would say myself that I am pessimistic about the human condition and optimistic about man.[25]

Greene's comment, as a doubting Christian, seems to agree more with the psychology of both Rieux and Paneloux than Camus' own ideas of a world without hope, and even to accord rather well with the existentialist idea that man's real hope for the future lies firmly within himself.

Perhaps this ambiguity is the inevitable result of the fact that Camus, like most people, was just not able to 'work out [his] inner contradictions'; perhaps, like Ivan Karamazov, he 'doesn't want to understand ... just stick to the facts', no matter how contradictory or absurd they may appear to be. In seeking to overcome nihilism, he admits the validity of the point of view of those who hold that the word 'creation' has a meaning which might imply a creator, without actually admitting the possibility of the existence of such a being or entity:

> I shall certainly not choose the moment when we are beginning to leave nihilism... to stupidly deny the values of creation in favour of the values of humanity, or vice versa. In my mind neither one is separated from the other and I measure the greatness of an artist (Molière, Tolstoy, Melville) by the balance he managed to maintain between the two.[26]

So the 'values of creation' are no longer a 'betrayal' of life but something that it would be 'stupid' to deny. Tolstoy would surely agree with the sentiments of Dr Rieux as he meditates on the life and death of his friend, Jean Tarrou, a meditation in which he seems to transcend both the empirical and the absurd:

> ... how hard it must be to live only with what one knows and what one remembers, cut off from what one hopes for. It was thus, most probably that Tarrou had lived, and he realized the bleak sterility of a life without illusions. There can be no peace without hope ... (PL 237).

Tarrou had lived as an outsider, an exile, unable to become a member of the society for which he worked so hard and sacrificed himself. He writes in his notebook of the strange absurdity of the old asthma patient and the old man whose main aim in life seems to have been to spit at certain cats from a balcony, and wonders if they had been 'saints'. Indeed, he 'hardly thought so' (PL 224), but the fact that he raised the question at all seems strange, in that neither of them did anything, at least as far as Tarrou was aware, for the benefit of others, while Tarrou's own quest for 'secular' sainthood led him to enormous efforts in helping to fight the plague without any regard for his own safety.

We have seen that Camus used the term 'absurd' to convey a specific idea of man's predicament, in particular, his sense of alienation from a meaningless universe. The language which he uses to describe this situation seems to vary considerably, however, to an extent which may lead us to wonder at his anthropomorphic imagery. At the end of *The Outsider*, for instance, we are told that Meursault 'laid [himself] open for the first time to the benign indifference of the world' (Out 117). Yet, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus describes 'the world' in rather different terms:

> At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman, and these hills, the softness of the sky, the outline of the trees at this very minute lose the illusory meaning with

> which we had clothed them, henceforth more remote than a lost paradise. The primitive hostility of the world rises up to face us across millennia (MOS 20).

Is it absurd for us to ask which is correct: whether the world shows us 'benign indifference' or 'primitive hostility', or perhaps both? But, of course, such feelings can only be within the mind of man: it is our *reaction* to the world which clothes it in meaning. Camus claims that the absurd comes into existence as a sort of third term in the confrontation of man and the world: 'The absurd is essentially a divorce. It lies in neither of the elements compared [man and the world]; it is born of their confrontation' (MOS 32). Yet the 'feeling of the absurd is not ... the notion of the absurd' (MOS 32). It seems that the 'feeling' of the absurd allows us to go beyond the absurd: 'it has the chance of going further', while it is the notion of the absurd that cannot allow such transcendence: 'I wish to limit myself to the facts, I know what man wants, I know what the world offers him, and now I can say that I also know what links them. I have no need to dig deeper' (MOS 34). Any attempt to 'dig deeper' is, as we saw earlier, regarded as a 'sacrifice of the intellect', or 'philosophical suicide': 'to an absurd mind reason is useless [in resolving the absurd] and there is nothing beyond reason' (MOS 38). Camus suggests that such thinkers as Kierkegaard do commit 'philosophical suicide' in their attempt to go beyond the absurd and, therefore, rationality. Kierkegaard's 'leap of faith', or any sort of faith, is possible only because of its irrational nature. Man is led to:

> blind himself to the absurd which hitherto enlightened him and to deify the only certainty he henceforth possesses, the irrational (MOS 40).

Perhaps it is only in the *feeling* of the absurd where the ideas of Rieux and Tarrou can make sense, and perhaps, also, it is in the area of this *feeling* (where we have the 'chance of going further') that such concepts as a 'leap of faith' can have their

existence beyond what Camus terms the rational. We might say that Camus, in his fiction at least, is describing a vision of existence which encompasses hope as well as illusions, transcending his own experience and apparent intentions, and, in spite of what he tries to tell us in some of his earlier essays, might be said to show the 'sterility' and the basically tragic nature of his notion of the 'absurd.' But, of course, we know that Camus himself was becoming more aware of the limitations of the Absurd, and beginning to see the idea as a perhaps necessary stepping stone on the way to a deeper reality, rather than an end in itself:

> The absurd world *in the beginning* is not analysed rigorously. It is evoked and it is imagined ... But once that world is sketched out, the first stone ... put in place, philosophising becomes possible. [But it is essential to move on because] one of the directions of the absurd spirit is poverty and destitution.[27]

Olivier Todd, commenting on the ideas found in *The Rebel*, suggests that:

> [in] *The Plague*, ... the lay or religious leaders fight the plague ... they *rebel* against it ... Camus had moved from what he called a philosophy of the Absurd to Revolt. His cycle of the Absurd carried a kind of pessimism. He was now trying to go beyond it.[28]

Camus, as we have seen, is moving toward the concept of revolt, but what is it that human beings should revolt against? A possible answer to this question, which will have ramifications for the work of both Greene and Camus, is the oppression of one or more humans by others, especially in the guise of Colonisation, an idea which we will explore in the next chapter.

6. COLONISATION AND OPPRESSION

Colonisation, whether it be in the form of overt imperialism, or in the perhaps more insidious form of the simple domination of one human being by another, can be seen as the spatial perspective of repression and forced alienation. The 'space' occupied by one or more humans, perhaps of a particular race or gender, is invaded by another human or group of humans, so that the control of this space is usurped by an alien power. This power then becomes the established norm, so that it is the indigenous group or individual which becomes alienated within what was originally its own space, whether the 'space' is defined in physical or metaphysical terms. It may even be the case that the indigenous population is actually driven out of its original home, (as was the case with the Native Americans), in which they become physical exiles, denied access to the physical space which they once occupied. On the other hand, it may be that the indigenous population remains in its homeland, becoming social or, as it were, metaphysical exiles: denied full access to the rights of citizenship enjoyed by the usurpers. This, of course, was the norm for those who lived under the occupation of the British or French imperialists in many countries throughout the world. It seems that Camus may have had a similar idea with regard to what we might term the invasion of Oran by the Plague (and, of course, the invasion and attempted colonisation of France by the Nazis): '*The Plague* has a social meaning *and* a metaphysical meaning.'[1]

Both Greene and Camus had personal experience of overt colonialism. In the case of Greene, he saw British colonialism first hand on many occasions; for example, when he was stationed in Sierra Leone from 1941 to 1943, where he performed intelligence work for the foreign Office[2] (experiences which he subsequently used in

the novel, *The Heart of the Matter*). For Camus, the experience was, of course, even more personal, having been brought up as a 'pied-noir', which was the name given to poor French colonials living in North Africa.

Throughout his life, Camus seems to have expressed feelings of sympathy for the indigenous, Arab population of Algeria, and their plight as an occupied people. He was appalled at the wholesale execution of Arab rebels including many intellectuals, during the uprisings against the French imperialists in the fifties; Lottman tells us that, just a year before his death:

> Camus sent constant urgent appeals [on behalf of Moslem activists] to de Gaulle ... and to the new Commission de Sauvegarde [which dealt with such matters] ... this group ... he literally bombarded with requests for clemency ... receiving from the commission ... lists of Moslems for whom Camus had intervened and who were to be liberated.[3]

But it may have been that these sentiments were more to do with Camus' feeling for humanity in general and his hatred of the death penalty in particular, rather than the plight of the Moslems as aliens or second class citizens within their own country: a country which was occupied by a foreign nation – *his* nation. In fact, Camus refused to come out in favour of Algerian independence, being uncomfortably ambivalent with regard to his feelings on national identity. Just after the war, for example, he was confronted by a visitor to his office at Gallimard (his publishers – where he also worked as an editor) who demanded:

> ... to know why Camus didn't join the Moslems' liberation movement. Camus said that he refused violence and murder. The visitor reminded him that he had accepted it during the Nazi occupation. Camus paled. ... "It's true [he said later to his secretary] that I wasn't shocked by resistance to the Nazis, because I was French and my country was occupied. I should accept the Algerian resistance too, but I'm French ...[4]

Olivier Todd describes how Camus had grown up in 'Belcourt, the lower working class district ... [of Algiers, near the] densely populated Moslem Kasbah ...[and the]

mixed nationalities neighbourhood of Bab el Oued,'[5] where it seems that he met daily with Arabs on a basis of apparent equality. It might seem that it is here that one might find the roots of his later sympathy for the Arab activists, but there seems to have been an innate racialism implicit in the attitude of the pied-noir at the time to which Camus himself was not altogether immune. Todd continues:

> In Belcourt, the lower class French rubbed shoulders with Arabs and believed they understood them, speaking in condescending generalities of "Ahmed" or "Fatma" instead of using their full Arab names ... but they would never think of receiving Arabs in their homes.[6]

Perhaps this culturally innate racialism, which Camus would have probably denied, accounts for his ambivalence toward violent resistance which we noticed above. Yet there can be no doubt about his total opposition to the death penalty, when imposed, as it were, in cold blood. Lottman tells us that:

> As an adult Albert Camus would stand apart from his peers because of his refusal to accept the death penalty, opposing ... the wartime execution of a Nazi collaborator ... [as well as] post-war executions of convicted collaborators ... [his antipathy to the death penalty] was a factor in his break with the Stalinists ... and led him to refuse the use of terrorism in a just cause by Algeria's Moslem nationalists.[7]

The roots of this aversion seem to be in some way connected with an incident from his childhood, in which his father, Lucien Camus, rose early one morning in order to attend a public execution. Camus writes of the incident in his essay, "Reflections on the Guillotine", attributing the story to his mother, Catherine Camus, (although Lottman feels that it may actually have been 'his grandmother, Catherine Sintes* ... who told the child'[8]). A farm worker was to be executed for the murder of 'a family of farmers, including the children,'[9] a crime for which Lucien Camus felt that

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* In his last novel, *The First Man*, which is generally regarded as semi-autobiographical, Camus uses the same anecdote. The Character of Jacques Cormery is thought to represent Camus, and the description which he gives of his father's visit to the execution is similar, in essence, to that given in 'Reflections on the Guillotine', except that, interestingly, he claims it is a story which 'he learned from his grandmother.' [11]

'decapitation was too mild a punishment', but the first hand experience of an execution seems to have had an unexpected and terrible effect on him:

> What he saw that morning he never told anyone ...he came rushing home, his face distorted, refused to talk, lay down for a moment on the bed, and suddenly began to vomit. He had discovered the reality hidden under the noble phrases with which it was masked. Instead of thinking of slaughtered children, he could think of nothing but that quivering body that had just been dropped onto a board to have its head cut off.[10]

Camus felt that if a 'simple, straightforward man' like his father had found the execution of such a 'monster' so repulsive, then this amounted to proof that the execution is no less nauseating than the crime itself. A conclusion which, it must be said, seems to be based more on emotion than logic.

The significance of this incident for Camus may be judged by the fact that the story is retold by two of Camus' fictional characters: Meursault in *The Outsider* and Jacques Cormery in *The First Man*, (see footnote p132). The story also seems to echo in the narrative of Jean Tarrou in *The Plague*; although in this case, as we have seen, it is his father who is the public prosecutor, and Tarrou himself who is repulsed by the sight of the 'real human being' whom they are intent on decapitating. In the case of Meursault, however, the story is very much like the actual account given by Camus in his essay: it is Meursault's mother who tells him the story, and, when his father got back from the execution, 'he'd been sick half the morning' (Outsider 106).

Meursault's situation may be read as a rather ambiguous mixture of oppression and colonisation: the death sentence which is imposed on him may be seen as the ultimate form of oppression, but what about the murdered Arab? He has also suffered the ultimate in oppression, yet his death seems insignificant beside the threatened death of the white, European coloniser. Camus seems to want us to see Meursault as the victim of a sort of Kafkaesque system of justice which resembles a piece of

'implacable machinery'* (Outsider p104), an absurd judicial process which is intent on condemning him to death because of his lack of moral feeling rather than for the crime of murder. We get the impression that, if only Meursault had lied about his lack of regret for his crime, the death penalty might have been avoided. Could this be because the murder of an Arab didn't seem to be really significant when balanced against the possible execution of a Frenchman in colonial Africa? Camus suggests that an execution is 'no less repulsive than the crime',[12] but implicit in the text of *The Outsider* seems to be the idea that this execution is actually *worse* than the crime. There is no reference to the Arab which in any way gives a picture of him as, to use Tarrou's words, a 'living human being'; rather he seems to be the anonymous, faceless victim of Meursault's strange inability to refrain from killing him. Would Meursault have pulled the trigger if the man had been a white Frenchman? To help us explore this question, let us dedicate a few paragraphs to a brief contextual examination of the character of Meursault.

Meursault outrages the sensibilities of others at his mother's funeral by making no overt display of grief or sadness. The following day, he even goes to the beach for a swim where he meets Marie, an old girl friend. They spend the day with each other, and in the evening he takes her to the cinema and finally back to his flat where they sleep together. When Marie asks him a few days later if he loves her, he tells the reader that 'I told her that it didn't mean anything but that I didn't think so' (Outsider 44). So, for Meursault, love 'didn't mean anything', neither with regard to Marie, nor,

* Given Camus' familiarity with the writings of Kafka, e.g. his essay 'Hope and the Absurd in the Works of Kafka', we might speculate on whether he found an echo of this idea in Kafka's *In The Penal Colony.*

it seems, judging by his lack of what might be termed a normal emotional response, towards his mother.

His next door neighbour, Raymond Sintè, is a pimp who plans to beat up his girlfriend, an Arab girl who is also, apparently, one of his prostitutes. Sintè's plan is to get the girl into bed, and '"right at the crucial moment", spit in her face and throw her out'. Meursault apparently finds no fault with this, and even agrees to help Sintè by writing a letter to the girl so that she will be more amenable to the idea of sleeping with him before he attacks her. Significantly, Meursault tells us that 'When he told me the girl's name I realized she was Moorish' (ibid. 36). Perhaps we may see the control which Raymond, as a pimp, exercises over this female as an example of metaphysical imperialism in two contexts: those of race *and* gender; as well as a manifestation of physical imperialism in that she is thrown out of the room in which they have been making love. Again we must question Meursault's attitude: would he have agreed to Sintè's plan if the girl had been European?

Later the girl's Arab brother and two of his friends threaten Meursault and Sintè while they are on the beach, but the trouble blows over. Inexplicably, Meursault takes Sintè's pistol and goes back along the beach alone. The sun is blazing down, so that he is driven toward the shade of a rock near a cool spring, but he sees one of the Arabs lying there. He moves towards the Arab who obviously feels threatened by the sight of the pistol and puts his hand in his jacket pocket as if to draw a knife. There was no apparent reason for Meursault to go on: he narrates, 'I realized that I only had to turn round and it would all be over. But the whole beach was reverberating with the sun and pressing me from behind' (ibid. 59).

What is it that drives Meursault on at this point? In *The First Man,* the character of the 'old doctor', referring to the atrocities committed by the Arabs on the white settlers in the fifties claimed that 'all the way back to the first criminal – you know, his name was Cain ... men are abominable, especially under a ferocious sun' (First Man 149), and perhaps Camus feels that it is really as simple as that. Certainly, the only explanation which Meursault himself gives is that, 'because I couldn't stand this burning feeling any longer, I moved forward' (Outsider 59). The Arab draws his knife and to Meursault the sun reflects from it like 'a red-hot blade gnawing at my eyelashes' (ibid. 60), so he shoots him. Not only this, but he shoots 'four more times at a lifeless body ... it was like four sharp knocks at the door of unhappiness' (ibid.).

Can we really accept what Meursault later says at his trial: that he committed murder 'because of the sun'? (p99) or is it just that Camus thinks that all men have something 'abominable' in them, and are all potential criminals, and that the 'burning sun' just makes them act 'especially' badly?* In the particular case of Meursault, a deeper clue to his motivation might be found when he tells us, slightly earlier in his trial, that 'I didn't much regret what I had done ... I'd never really been able to regret anything' (p97). He seems to have no idea at all of the value of the life which he has destroyed, and no feelings of regret for the beating and humiliation of the Arab girl.

Just before his execution, he achieves a final acceptance of the meaninglessness of his place in an 'absurd' universe as he confronts the 'benign indifference of the world ... finding it so much like myself' (p117). It seems that it is with a feeling of 'benign indifference' therefore, that Meursault himself views the world around him,

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* It is significant, perhaps, that at the time when Camus was preparing to write *The Plague*, we find the following entry in his *Notebooks*: 'For *The Plague*: There are more things in men to admire than to despise.'[13] We might conjecture that, for Camus, there are more humans who are similar to Rieux and Grand than to Meursault or Cottard.

including the rest of humanity. This does seem to express quite well his feelings for the death of his mother: he remembers her with vague kindness and does seem to mildly regret her passing; yet it can hardly be claimed that the word 'benign' is in any way appropriate to the shooting of the Arab, or his part in the Arab girl's humiliation. One must ask whether racialism or colonialism was an implicit factor in this, or perhaps he is 'benign' only to those who he feels are significant in regard to his own existence.

There will be no 'depths of ... fidelity' to plumb in the character of Meursault as there seemed to be in that of Rose; no intimations of tenderness or rage at the injustice of the exploitation of the weak by the strong. In fact, we might say that Meursault seems to be far more of an emotional cripple than either Pinkie or Raven, who at least try, in their distorted and perhaps useless way, to resist what they see as injustice when it is directed against themselves; neither is he like another 'outsider', Jean Tarrou, who actively desired to hurt no-one, and whom we could not imagine consenting to write Sintè's letter for him. With this in mind, we might say that, in Meursault, Camus has created the perfect exile, the supreme example of the alienation of the human powers of 'solicitous care' and engagement with others which we need for true self-realisation. It could be argued that, through his complicity in the usurpation by Sintè of the Moorish girl's right to control her own life, he has become a de facto imperialist, so that it is only a step further to invade the space of the Arab on the beach and to deliver the ultimate sanction of depriving him of his very life. From this perspective, we might say that it is the very fact that the 'outsider' Meursault is an exile from the what society might call the 'normal' code of conduct, that *allows* him to connive at the alienation of the rights of the Arab girl and her

brother. We might see this as a sort of reversal of the usual effect of imperialism: Meursault became an imperialist because he was an outsider, whereas a country like France becomes an outsider because of its assumption of the imperialist role as an alien power. It may be interesting to look at what Camus wrote in 1955, as an 'Afterword' to the novel:

> [Meursault] is condemned because he doesn't play the game ... he refuses to lie. ... he is driven by a tenacious and therefore profound passion ... for an absolute and for truth. So ... [he] agrees to die for the truth (Outsider pp118/9).

The notion that he '*agrees* to die for the truth' [my emphasis] seems very strange when juxtaposed with his thoughts in the condemned cell; for instance, when considering the possibility of a pardon, he has to 'control that burning rush of blood that would make my eyes smart and my whole body delirious with joy' (ibid. 110). These feelings held by a man who has 'agreed' to face the guillotine indeed seem to rather go along with Camus' almost heroic description, in the sense that he is placing a higher value on maintaining his integrity than on his desire to go on living. Nevertheless, the claim that he 'refuses to lie' needs a little closer examination. Insofar as Camus is describing Meursault's refusal to lie in court about his own feelings in order to save his life, he is partly accurate, but it does seem as if there is a sense in which Meursault is actually *unable* to lie, because he just doesn't have the imagination. At his trial, he is more annoyed than interested at the proceedings, he just wants to 'get it over with and get back to my cell and sleep' (Outsider p101). Conor Cruise O'Brien seems to agree with this view. Speaking of the number of commentaries which go along with Camus' idea he writes:

> ... the Meursault of the actual novel is not quite the same person as the Meursault of the commentaries. Meursault in the novel lies. He concocts for Raymond [Sintè] the letter which is designed to deceive the Arab girl and expose her to humiliation, and later he lies to the police to get Raymond discharged, after

> beating the girl up. It is simply not true that Meursault is 'intractable in his absolute respect for the truth' [as Camus claims] These episodes show him as indifferent to truth as he is to cruelty.[14]

Meursault can be seen, therefore, in marked contrast to such characters as Tarrou, Rieux or Paneloux in *The Plague*, all of whom achieve a degree of engagement with the reality of the existence of others. Yet there *is* a sort of integrity displayed by Meursault when he refuses to lie at his trial in order to help himself. O'Brien suggests that:

> The reason [for this refusal to lie] can only be that his own feelings, and his feelings about his feelings are sacrosanct. They are the god whom he will not betray and for whom he is martyred. His integrity is that of the artist, the Nietzschean integrity. The idea of him as an enemy of 'social oppression' lacks reality.[15]

Whoever holds to this type of 'integrity' must surely focus always on his own feelings at the expense of those of anyone else, and so must be marked out from his fellow citizens as an unknowable 'stranger'. Pinkie also, as we have seen, has a strange, self-obsessed integrity, but he is at least able to feel something close to respect for at least one other person: Kite, his old gang boss who took him in when he was homeless. Also, unlike Meursault, he has intimations that there might be more to existence than we are immediately aware of, some sort of spiritual dimension, and he is able to feel at least the beginnings of tenderness for Rose on several occasions. Meursault feels none of this; it seems that his apparent 'respect for the truth' is nothing other than an obsession, like the 'artist', with his own creation; but his creation, in this case, is nothing other than himself. (Could this be the basis, we may wonder, on which Sartre claims Meursault to be an 'Existentialist Hero'? see above p10).

Yet this self-created personality had enough regard for another in the person of the (to us) despicable Sintè, to try to keep him from shooting the Arab on the beach by

an appeal to some sort of distorted idea of justice: 'he hasn't said anything to you yet. It'd be unfair to shoot him just like that' (Outsider p57). Perhaps sensing that it is not really the thing to shoot someone just because they say 'something' to you, Meursault then elevates the criterion for action by saying 'if he doesn't draw his knife, you can't shoot.' (ibid.) Shortly after this, Meursault takes charge of the gun, and realises that 'you could either shoot or not shoot.' This is an extremely significant moment for Meursault: he has set the limits of the situation in which shooting is impermissible by saying that it is wrong to shoot 'if he doesn't draw his knife', but if this limit is passed, then there is nothing to prevent the shooting; 'you could either shoot or nor shoot.' Meursault has absolutely no reason to want to shoot the Arab himself, except perhaps for some sort of feeling of solidarity with Sintè, but even this is no longer relevant when he faces the Arab alone: Sintè is obviously not present and in no danger. It seems that Meursault has trapped himself within his own logic: if the Arab draws his knife, then it is alright to shoot; there is nothing to prevent him because he has no human resources to draw on in the form of regard for others, or any ideas of social morality, because such feelings are just not present within the 'self' which he has created. As O'Brien suggests: 'Meursault is scrupulous in regard to his own feelings and indifferent to the society around him'.[16]

A more sinister consequence of this seems to be the idea, mentioned above, that he was able to feel some sort of rudimentary solidarity with Sintè and romantic feelings for Marie, both of whom were European like himself, but nothing whatsoever for the unfortunate Arab girl and her brother. It seems, therefore, very unlikely that Meursault would have shot a white European whom he might have regarded as a real human being, quite so readily as he shot the Arab whom, we might speculate, he

might not have regarded at all except as a sort of background feature of life, like the lifeless rocks on the beach, and with far less significance than the 'sheets of flame' which 'rained down from the sun'.

Camus, on many occasions, demonstrated his sympathy for the desperate situation of the Arabs in North Africa, but I suggest that he did not always do this with total honesty. In a letter of 1955 to M. Aziz Kessous, an Algerian socialist, Camus writes:

> Believe me when I tell you that Algeria is the cause of my suffering at present ... I have been on the verge of despair. We know nothing of the human heart if we imagine that the Algerian French can forget the massacres at Philippeville and elsewhere.* And it is another form of madness to imagine that repression can make the Arab masses feel confidence for France.[17]

It seems that Camus is avoiding the crucial question here: why *should* the 'Arab masses' – a rather condescending phrase, surely? – have confidence in a colonial power which is occupying its country, and governing it with laws formulated in a foreign capital, whether or not that power is openly repressive? Camus obviously feels that the French settlers have a *right* to live in Algeria, a right which can only be based on the French conquest of the territories in question, and the fact that they have been there for 'more than a century.' Camus continues: 'The "French fact" cannot be eliminated in Algeria, and the dream of a sudden disappearance of France is childish.'[18] It seems that Camus in fact supports the French colonial presence in Algeria, feeling that, if this presence is sufficiently benign, it is something in which the Arabs *would* have confidence. He is apparently ignoring the natural aspirations which must be felt by any nation for self-determination within its homeland, while at

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* On 20 August 1955, a rising at Aïn Abid and at the mine of Al-Alia near Philippeville (now Skikda) degenerated into a massacre of Europeans, followed by executions of Muslims.
(C T Evans, 'Timeline', 2000).

the same time trying to accommodate his notions of a sort of brotherhood with the Moslems: a brotherhood which seems to have its roots in Camus' imagination rather than in the reality of the uneasy collision of European and Islamic Cultures.

Returning to Meursault and his trial, we may guess that it was extremely unlikely that a French colonial court would have dealt with the shooting of an Arab by a white man in the even-handed way which Camus describes. O'Brien writes:

> ... the presentation in this way of a court in Algeria trying a crime of this kind involves the novelist in a myth: the myth of French Algeria ... by suggesting that the court is impartial between Arab and Frenchman, it implicitly denies the colonial reality and sustains the colonial fiction.[19]

If we accept O'Brien's perspective, then the 'colonial reality' seems to have been that the Arab had become a metaphysical exile, outside the justice of the legal system which governs his own country, alienated from what should be his own rights and powers as a citizen. Once again, we have the situation where, according to Marx's theory of alienation, it is only violent revolution which can remedy the situation, so that the Moslem struggle for independence becomes a necessity, even an inevitability, rather than a 'childish' dream. It seems that, just as Camus is wrong about his own creation when he claims that Meursault 'refuses to lie', he is also deluding himself when he imagines that the 'myth of French Algeria' is anything other than a fiction, and that, in this context at least, Camus himself no more 'refuses to lie' than does Meursault.

Does Greene's attitude to colonisation differ significantly from that of Camus? It is certainly true that Greene's idea of a colonial court is every bit as absurd as the 'apparatus' portrayed by Camus. In *Ways of Escape*, during a section where he refers to his stay in Sierra Leone, he describes how a 'boy' of his (using the old colonial

term for a male servant) was prosecuted for 'perjury, an offence beyond his comprehension' (WoE 116). The image is again Kafkaesque as the young African, is subjected to the authority of a court presided over by an 'absurd bewigged English judge', who is the representative of an alien culture, using an alien language to accuse him of a crime the nature of which he cannot understand, and for which he is convicted and sent to prison. It might be interesting to meditate on whether the 'boy' is perhaps even more of an outsider at his trial than was Meursault. Greene claims that:

> I was never ... a British Imperialist. It was lucky probably that I went to Africa when I was young; if I had gone ten years later I might have had my fixed ideas and been looking for things which I had already somehow established in my mind.[20]

We may contrast this with the situation of Camus, who actually spent the whole of his childhood and adolescence in a French colony, so that it would have been difficult for him to regard it as anything other than his actual homeland.

Perhaps Greene is not quite so far away from imperialism as he imagines. In his biography, *A Sort of Life*, he talks of his Grandfather, William Greene, who, he tells us, 'went out to St Kitts [then a British colony in the West Indies] as a boy of fourteen to join his brother in the management of his father's sugar estates ... his brother [Charles] died of yellow fever two years after his arrival.'[21] The words which Greene uses as he continues his tale seem significant: [after his brother's death] 'William was alone on the island, in charge of the estates.'[22] The remarkable thing is that William was apparently 'alone' despite the fact that 'Charles had left thirteen children behind him when he died...' Of course, what Greene meant that he was alone except for the native islanders and his brother's half-caste children – his nephews. The interesting point here is that Greene seems to have slipped into a way of speaking which reduces

non-Whites to a level where they cannot actually be seen except as a sort of general background for the Europeans. O'Brien suggests that Camus does a very similar thing through most of *The Plague.* The Arab population of Oran is discussed early in the text in a conversation between Rieux and Rambert (Pl pp12/13), but subsequently, 'the Arabs of Oran absolutely cease to exist.'[23] Greene's claim that his grandfather was 'alone on the island' seems to implicitly suggest that he was the only *human being* there. However, such a way of expressing himself is not Greene's usual tone; when he speaks, for instance, of one his African bearers on his trek through Liberia in 1936 in *Journey Without Maps*, one can sense the empathy which Greene feels for the man as he comes alive for us out of the text:

> Suddenly Babu sat down by the side of the path and changed his vest. He smiled shyly, winningly; we were coming to a town; he had to clean himself, just as much as any season-ticket-holder who straightens his tie before he gets to the City.[41]

Earlier in the same book, Greene writes of his journey away from the coast of Sierra Leone into the 'unspoiled' regions of the Protectorate and out of the actual Colony:

> The change was more than a matter of geography or administration. The Englishmen here did not talk about the bloody blacks nor did they patronize or laugh at them; they had to deal with the real natives ... and the real native was someone to love and admire.[25]

Norman Sherry expands upon Greene's admiration for the African native: 'Though white[men] claimed that a 'black boy will always do you down', [Greene] never found any dishonesty in his boys or the carriers or the natives of the interior.'[26] Greene tells us that he found 'only gentleness, kindness, an honesty which one would not have found, or dared to assume was there, in Europe.'[27] Greene further demonstrates his respect:

> Love, it has been said, was invented in Europe by the troubadours, but it existed here without the trappings of civilization. They were tender towards their children

> ... they were tender towards each other ... One was aware the whole time of a standard of courtesy to which it was one's responsibility to conform.[28]

It would appear that Greene is able, at least to some extent, to transcend the racism which seems inseparable from an entrenched colonial perspective.

It is difficult, however, to find a similar note of respect and humility in the writings of Camus, until, perhaps, his later works, such as *Exile and the Kingdom,* or *The First Man.* In the latter, for instance, the character of Henri Cormery (based, we believe, on Camus' father) experiences a moment of comradeship with an Arab servant during the final stages of his wife's pregnancy: '... he extended his hand: the other man took it in the Arab fashion, with the ends of his fingers, then lifted it to his lips.'[29] Such empathy is certainly not present in *the Outsider* or *The Plague.* We may contrast this with a seemingly unimportant episode in *Brighton Rock,* where Ida Arnold meets some Negroes in the Seven Dials district of London (BR pp37/8). She addresses one by name: 'How's business Joe?', and then asks about his 'hay fever'. Joe replies 'Tur'ble, Ida, tur'ble.' This apparently trivial exchange may be more significant than it at first seems: Ida and Joe are apparently on familiar terms; they know each other's names, and Ida is aware that Joe is in 'business' and is troubled by hay fever. Despite the fact that we, today, might detect a note of condescension in Greene's attempt to imitate the Jamaican way of speaking, it nevertheless serves in bringing the character to life as a real human being who has a friendly relationship with one of the main protagonists, and is human enough to suffer from hay fever. When we consider that the Negro population of London in 1938 was very small, especially compared with the Arab population of Oran which formed an overwhelming majority, the contrast between the attitudes of the two writers, at least

during the periods when *The Plague* and *Brighton Rock* were written, becomes apparent.

Perhaps it was the fact that Greene, as a child, did not come into substantial contact with non-whites which allowed him the distance needed to see them with greater clarity than Camus, who had grown up amongst them. Whatever the reason, it does seem that, at least from the colonialist point of view, Greene achieved a degree of maturity as a young writer which did not come to Camus until later in his career. We have looked at O'Brien's claim that the 'Arabs of Oran absolutely cease to exist'; in addition, O'Brien goes on to point out that the purpose of the Arabs being mentioned at all is to 'provide the occasion for [a] demonstration of [Dr Rieux's] integrity.'[30] But we may argue that Rieux's integrity is actually compromised, or at least left in question, by the way in which the Arabs were used to define it and then discarded as of no further significance, while the text from this point onward concentrates exclusively on the Europeans.

Another way in which Camus seems to have been blind to the situation of the indigenous population is that, in creating an analogy between the disease carried by the rats and the Nazism carried by the German invaders of France, he has missed a significant point: a point which O'Brien Puts in this way:

> There were Arabs for whom 'French Algeria' was a fiction quite as repugnant as the fiction of Hitler's new European order was for Camus and his friends. For such Arabs, the French were in Algeria in virtue of the same right by which the Germans were in France: the right of conquest.[31]

By his failure to embrace this perspective, I suggest that Camus has unintentionally identified himself with the oppressor rather than the oppressed, and that the fight against the plague of Oran may also be seen as an analogy of the fight of the invisible Arabs for control of their own space, both physical and metaphysical, in which to

achieve their full potential as human beings. O'Brien continues: 'From this point of view, Rieux, Tarrou and Grand were not devoted fighters against the plague: they were the plague itself.'[32]

Perhaps we can gain some insight into Camus' apparent shortcomings in this area if we briefly examine his attitude to history. Lev Braun tells us that, for Camus, 'history lacks any discernible meaning.'[33] The term 'history' is here to be mainly understood as referring to the Hegelian concept of 'historicism',* which was later embraced by Marxists in general, and 'Sartre and the *Temps Modernes* group'[36] in particular. For such as these, history seems to be some sort of almost sentient entity (although I am sure that they would have disagreed with such a notion), which strives constantly toward some great future for mankind. The defeat of the Nazis, for example, becomes inevitable for Marxists, because history could never allow such evil to prevail: 'Hitler was the latest incarnation of capitalist imperialism; therefore, history had worked against him.'[37] Such thinking would be abhorrent to Camus, for whom the defeat of Hitler, like the defeat of the plague, was something which humans must work together to achieve without depending on 'history' or God or anything else except their combined effort as a moral community.

Yet there may be a sense in which Camus' own thinking can be expressed as a sort of evolving social empiricism, which it would be impossible to achieve without some sort of historical dialectic, and that an evolution of this kind must endow such a historical process with meaning. Jeffrey Isaac suggests that 'as Camus' thinking

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* 'Hegel thought that history displays a rational process of development ... and is heading toward a goal that we can welcome. ... "The History of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of freedom."' [34] Marx accepted this as a general premise, but sought to strip the idea of the religious dimension which Hegel had felt was fundamental: 'Hegel ... saw the task of self-fulfilment ... as a philosophical-religious one. It was Marx ...who first attempted to see it as fundamentally a matter of the social and economic conditions in which people live ...'[35]

matured', he became more socially aware and gradually less concerned with the predicament of the individual in isolation, and that '*The Plague* expresses this evolution in its fictional depiction of the solidarity between the characters of Rieux and Tarrou.'[38] In Camus' own words, this can be described as a 'transition from an attitude of solitary revolt to the recognition of a community whose struggles must be shared ... in the direction of solidarity and participation.'[39] We can surely notice the relevance here to Rambert's realisation that 'this business is everyone's business' (see above p59); perhaps the young man's evolution from selfishness to solidarity is reflected in Camus' evolution from creator of Meursault, to creator of Rieux. Such evolution, however, must take place over a period of time, and is therefore historical by definition. Camus, it could be argued, is seeking to ground his ideas on a historical meaningfulness which he seeks at the same time to deny. Consequently, although Camus' vision seems to have evolved in the way we have described, he was still trapped within the limits of his white European perspective, locked into a present which could not confront the colonial history of his African homeland. Surely, we may protest, it would only be a matter of time before Camus, with his manifest empathy for all of humanity, realised that 'this business' of colonial oppression is 'everyone's business', no matter what their race or whether or not the colonialists happen to be French, and that a 'dream' of their 'disappearance' is no more 'childish' than the dream of liberation from the Nazis. But, of course, such a possibility can never, now, be realised, and such thoughts can only add to the tragic nature of his early death.

Greene seems to have reached an appreciation of the reality of colonialism at an earlier period in his life and work, so that he was able to involve himself with, and, in

a small way, perhaps actually to become part of the history of the people of the West African districts in which he travelled and of which he wrote. Yet, in the case of Camus, in his last, unfinished work, although the Arabs exist as 'these people, alluring yet disturbing', he was still, unfortunately, able to write of the first French settlers of Algeria as if they were the first civilised human beings to inhabit the land, in a way almost reminiscent of Joseph Conrad:

> ... this was the very country into which he had been tossed, as if he were the first inhabitant, or the first conqueror, landing where the law of the jungle still prevailed.[40]

Ironically, it is Camus' own words written in 1951 in his introduction to *The Rebel* which seems provide one of the most telling comments at this point: 'The prodigious history evoked here is the history of European pride.'[41]

PART THREE

7. FREEDOM AND RESISTANCE

In order for there to be any possibility of authentic human action, or any sort of responsibility, praise or blame attached to an individual for his or her actions, it seems uncontroversial to suggest that there must firstly exist the possibility of individual freedom. At the end of chapter five, I suggested that both Greene and Camus saw revolt as the only way to bring real freedom into existence; to clarify this idea, I would like to propose two different concepts of freedom for consideration, which I shall call 'amoral' and 'moral', and suggest that it is with the second of these concepts - 'moral freedom' - that both authors are mainly concerned. Further, I suggest that, within this second concept, freedom and resistance are interdependent to the extent that not only is resistance impossible without at least some measure of freedom, but also that freedom can actually be defined as the ability to resist.

The idea of amoral freedom relates to a choice of action by an agent in circumstances where there will be little or no resistance to overcome in the performance of the action. This may be in the sense of everyday choices, as in deciding to go to the theatre rather than the cinema, but may also include important, non-trivial decisions such as choice of career, or even choosing to help a friend or loved one who is in trouble. It may, at first glance, seem strange to include this last example in the category of amoral, but I do so in the sense that the agent is performing an act against which he experiences no resistance either from an outside agency, or from within himself: it is an act which he is free to perform and which he actually *desires* to perform (at least in some cases). In this situation, although the

action may *conform* to a moral or legal criterion and can therefore be legitimately praised as a 'good' act (taking the term 'good' in the loose sense in which it is used in everyday language), the motive for the action is nevertheless grounded in the personal desires of the agent, and so cannot *strictly* be described as moral.

The second or moral category refers to a situation where the freedom of the agent to perform a certain act is threatened either by external or internal forces, and will almost always require a degree of courage, endurance or self-sacrifice on the part of the agent. The action in question may be on behalf of others, e.g. helping disadvantaged citizens of one's community, or on behalf of the agent himself, e.g. overcoming one's fear of an oppressor in order to achieve justice for oneself or one's family. Examples of external forces may include: an oppressive regime in which the citizens of a state are not free to enjoy what we might think of as their normal rights; a family situation where the patriarch denies a female member the right to adequate education; or the forceable occupation of one state by another (which, of course, Camus deals with in *The Plague).* As I have said, resistance to such external forces often requires courage or endurance, but, more than this, the agent must necessarily adhere to ideals of justice and personal freedom, and it is these ideals which place the act of resistance in the moral sphere. Camus suggests that:

> 'Rebellion cannot exist without the feeling that somewhere, in some way, you are justified ... the man concerned experiences a feeling of revulsion at the infringement of his rights, but also a complete and spontaneous loyalty to certain aspects of himself ... he implicitly brings into play a standard of values so far from being false that he is willing to preserve them at all costs.[1]

We need to be careful here, however: such idealism is normally seen as moral in a 'good' sense, but might equally well represent the resistance of a criminal to the forces of law which he sees as curtailing his freedom of action, as in the case of

Pinkie Brown who commits murder in order to continue to enjoy such freedom. Such a choice of action is, of course, the opposite of what is normally considered to be 'moral', but is nevertheless able to be included in the concept of 'moral freedom' in the sense that it can be judged according to the values of society as 'morally bad'. Freedom, in this context, can have no moral meaning unless the agent is free to choose evil as well as good.

This is also true in a situation where the agent experiences *internal* resistance to a moral action, which is, perhaps, a little more problematical. Let us take the example of, say, a man who sees an innocent person being attacked by muggers: the man is extremely frightened, but nevertheless overcomes his fear and goes to the assistance of the victim. We would surely say that this action is firmly in the moral sphere; he has overcome the internal resistance of his fear to perform a praiseworthy and altruistic act: he has shown courage. If the man had felt no fear (there are, apparently, such people) then, although we could still praise him for helping the victim, he could not be called brave, and, if he also *desired* to help the victim (perhaps a friend or family member), the act could not *strictly* be called moral: there was no internal resistance to overcome in doing what he desired to do. Immanuel Kant suggested that a purely moral act could take place only in a situation where the agent 'performs the action without any inclination at all, but solely from duty – then for the first time his action has genuine moral worth.'[2] An example of such a situation may be where there would be personal danger or discomfort in going to the assistance of someone for whom we hold feelings of strong dislike, but whom we nevertheless feel it is our duty to help. Of course, the life situations in which we have to make such choices are rarely as black and white as this suggests, nor does Kant want to say that there can be

no practical moral value in performing acts which we feel inclined to do,* but I will nevertheless suggest that *moral* freedom cannot be achieved without the courage to struggle against the forces which tend to enslave the individual, whatever the origin of those forces. I believe this to be the sense in which, as I claimed at the beginning of this chapter, both Greene and Camus saw freedom as being contingent upon resistance, and is the sense in which I will here use the word 'freedom'.

Grounded in this idea of individual moral freedom, is the idea of social or communal freedom, which, it may be argued, cannot exist without the freedom of the individual agents which make up a given community. Perhaps the most significant form which social freedom can take is when a community confronts and resists any force, either internal or external, which tends to restrict or inhibit its power of acting for the benefit of its citizens; we may describe this as the realisation of freedom through the very act of resistance. Further, as I have suggested, we may argue that the concept of freedom can have no meaning without such forces of opposition. Of course, this power of action must inevitably include the possibility of what we might consider moral or immoral acts, in a similar way to Kierkegaard's notion that there can be no possibility of good without the possibility of evil; nevertheless, we can claim that freedom may in fact be defined as the human ability to resist oppression.

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* Kant has been, in my opinion, frequently misunderstood in this context by those who point to the supposed irrelevance of his ideas to 'real life'. He makes it quite clear in his preface to *The Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals* that he is 'working out ... a pure moral philosophy that is wholly cleared of anything that can only be empirical'. This 'pure' philosophy does not, however, entail a denial of the reality of everyday life: 'For man is affected by so many inclinations that ... he is not so easily able to make that idea [of 'pure' morality] effective *in concreto* in the conduct of his life'.[3]

For Sartre, 'freedom is the foundation of all values',[4] and the two perspectives of individual and communal freedom are totally interdependent, forming the very definition of what it means to be human:

> ... in thus willing freedom, we discover that it depends entirely on the freedom of others and that the freedom of others depends upon our own. Obviously, freedom as the definition of man does not depend upon others, but as soon as there is commitment, I am obliged to will the liberty of others at the same time as mine.[5]

'Willing freedom', in this context, implies resistance or revolution: 'A man who belongs to some ... revolutionary society wills certain concrete ends, which imply the will to freedom, but that freedom is willed in a community'.[6] Camus holds a similar idea of the nature of freedom, but with perhaps a rather more pragmatic slant. He claimed in 1955 that 'The freedom of each finds its limits in that of others; no one has a right to absolute freedom',[7] his concept of resistance and rebellion, however, seems to be rather more metaphysical. Jeffrey Isaac suggests that:

> For Camus rebellion is at the heart of the Western experience. It is a demand on the part of man for recognition, a refusal of indignity and a "Passionate affirmation" of human value. Camus' rebellion refers to the exercise of human freedom, to the fact that humans are agents always capable of surpassing or at least distancing themselves from their existing circumstances.[8S]

The idea of human freedom either from a personal or collective point of view was also of transcendent importance for Greene. Professor Adam Jones, in an epitaph to Greene, comments on his support for the Sandinista government of Nicaragua in its struggle for freedom against the Contras: 'He was ... a committed and active opponent of repressive regimes around the world, and he maintained an enduring relationship with national liberation movements and progressive governments in Latin America and elsewhere.'[9] Greene was honoured by the Nicaraguans for his support of their struggle, by the award of the Ruben Darío Medal, the country's highest literary accolade. In his acceptance speech he told the Nicaraguan people:

> I see Nicaragua not only as a small country fighting a bully in the north. I see you more, even more, as being on the front line of trenches in a world wide conflict. You are the first defenders in a war between civilisation and barbarism. I am proud to be here, and I pray for your victory.[10]

Greene, Camus and Sartre, therefore, held that freedom is something for which every human agent should strive through resistance to oppression, yet, in saying this, do we assume that freedom, or at least the idea of freedom, is a real possibility in every situation? This is certainly not immediately apparent either in the case of Pinkie Brown in *Brighton Rock* or of Raven in *A Gun for Sale*. How well founded in reality, therefore, is this idea of Freedom? For Karl Marx, as we discussed earlier, it is not at all clear that an individual always has the power to achieve freedom in isolation. Marx claims that a member of the proletariat in a capitalist system is 'alienated' from his true nature and potential as a human being because he is not in control of the product of his own labour. We can see a surface similarity between Marx and Kierkegaard in the idea that human existence cannot be meaningful in an 'inauthentic' state which is devoid of true self realisation, but the conclusions which they draw are very different. For Kierkegaard, the answer must be found within the individual: 'with the whole inwardness of his personality',[11] whereas, for Marx, the individual may not have the necessary freedom to achieve his true nature or 'species being' (to use Marx's term), under a system in which the bourgeoisie owns the capital and the means of production. Marx, with Friedrich Engels (1820-95) wrote that:

> ... the division of labour [in which a worker is given a specific task which forms only a small part of the whole production process] ... implies the contradiction between the interest of the separate individual or the individual family and the communal interest ... as long as [this] cleavage exists between the particular and the common interest, as long, therefore, as activity [for the worker] is not voluntarily, but naturally divided, man's own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him.[12]

The tension between individual and communal freedom under a Capitalist system becomes apparent: such a system, which is seen as 'natural' rather than 'voluntary', may provide a more efficient means of production but at the cost of alienating the individual from the possibility of freedom. The only remedy for this situation is to change society by revolution. David West, commenting on this aspect of Marxian thought, explains that, for Marx, 'the proletariat ... through its future role in a socialist revolution ... will liberate humanity from its alienated condition.'[13]

For Marx, the root of this alienation lies within the structure of the bourgeois family unit, which he seems to regard as intrinsically pernicious. We saw, in the introductory chapter, how Marx claims that the division of labour finds its first expression in the family, in which the wife and children become the 'slaves of the husband'. There is a sense here in which the husband actually seems to own his own family: 'This latent slavery in the family ... is the first property.'[14] Any freedom which the wife or children may experience, therefore, would be allowed or withheld at the whim of the father, and so cannot really be described as freedom at all.

Camus presents us with a small vignette which seems to represent this idea: Jean Tarrou is told, by a hotel porter, of a family which regularly dine at the hotel restaurant. The 'paterfamilias' always enters with his children 'dressed like performing poodles at his heels' (PL 26). He bluntly 'tells the kids what he thinks of them,' often reducing the little girl to tears. When, at the dining table, the boy excitedly talks of the situation with regard to the 'rats', the father's reaction is to curtly 'forbid' the boy ever to use the word in 'the future'. The mother (another of Camus' insignificant females), a 'tiny woman, like a black mouse', performs her 'natural' function of agreeing with her husband: '"Your father's right" approved the

mouse.' (Camus seems to be enjoying a quip – the 'mouse' approves when talk of 'rats' is forbidden). We later learn (PL 97) that the 'paterfamilias' is, in fact, M. Othon the magistrate, whose son, Jacques (one of the 'performing poodles') will tragically die of the plague.

'This excellent example', (to use the porter's words) of a dictatorial patriarch seems to be typical of Marx's bourgeois family/slave owner, jealous of his own power over his 'property', constantly seeking to keep them in subjection. Simone de Beauvoir, who was a friend and intimate of both Camus and Sartre, expresses the situation from a similar, property-oriented perspective:

> ... woman, as slave or vassal, is integrated within families dominated by fathers and brothers, and she has always been given in marriage by certain males to other males.[15]

It seems that this form of family or personal 'alienation' eventually gives rise to a communal disenfranchisement, where the capitalist controller of the means of production takes the place of the paterfamilias. Paradoxically, this can have a positive, even a necessary aspect, inasmuch as it can give rise to strong feelings of anger and frustration, which can provide the impetus needed for social change.

From the perspectives of both Marx and Kierkegaard, neither Greene's 'bewildered multitudes' of Brighton nor Camus' complacent citizens of Oran* are free to achieve their true nature as human beings. For Marx, they are slaves within a system in which their power is alienated, while, perhaps more significantly, for

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* It could, perhaps, be argued that the citizens of Oran with their interest in 'getting rich', in 'commerce' and in 'doing business' are really bourgeois in character rather than proletarian, so that they are not enslaved in the way that wage labourers would be. There seem to be two points here: although the bourgeois have control over the means of production, they are themselves nevertheless exiled from the world which the workers inhabit, a world full of rich experience as well as human suffering of which they have no understanding, so that their freedom is limited by their own ignorance. A further restriction on the freedom of the bourgeois is his dependence on the idea of a 'free market economy'. He has elevated this to the supreme principle of economics, but, as Prof. Allen Wood writes in the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, p22; '... the power of the market... is 'free' only in the sense that it is beyond the control of its human creators, enslaving them by separating them from one another.' The capitalist is, therefore, just as alienated from his own human potential as is the worker; they are *both* slaves of the 'market'.

Kierkegaard it is their own complacency which enslaves them in that they lack the liberating awareness of their true nature as human beings. From both points of view they are exiles within the very societies of which they seem to be a part. However, events are fast approaching which will jolt both communities out of their complacency. In the case of Brighton, England is only one year away from a war with Nazi Germany which will force the country to face the threat of invasion and enslavement by a foreign power; in the case of Oran this threat will become a reality as the plague takes hold within the walls of the town.

For Camus the achievement of individual human freedom does seem to be a real possibility. Rambert in *The Plague,* initially sees himself as a 'stranger' who didn't belong in the community in which he had become trapped. In a conversation with Rieux, Rambert rather petulantly claims that the doctor lacks 'common human feeling' because he won't help him to escape. While they talk, 'A small boy had just run against [Rieux's] legs, and fallen: he set him on his feet again.' Pl 72). This is a rather nice analogy of what is really going on: Rieux is dealing with the thoughtless and immature tirade of Rambert just as if he were a child 'running against his legs'; the doctor will soon help Rambert to his feet. As we saw in chapter two, after a period of learning through his experiences with the plague and the people who suffer its consequences, (in particular the death of the young Jacques Othon) Rambert's eyes are opened to the fact that the 'plague is everyone's business' (Pl p170). This allows him to mature into a responsible human who engages with the reality of life, freely choosing to end his self-imposed alienation within the community of Oran. Earlier, we looked at Heidegger's notion of 'solicitous concern' as one of the underpinnings of a truly authentic existence, and this seems to describe rather well the achievement

of Rambert, in that he has finally come to an imaginative realisation of the presence of suffering human beings, whose very otherness defines his own existence. He has also chosen to confront and accept his temporary separation from his wife by giving up his attempts to escape from the town; in this way he gains a measure of control over this separation by bringing it within the area of his free, autonomous choice. When they are finally reunited, his joy is intensified by his deeper sense of self-awareness; he realises that 'all [will] be restored to him in a flash, and joy break on him like a flame with which there is no dallying' (Pl 240). In facing up courageously to the possibility of infection and death by choosing to stay in Oran, he becomes, perhaps for the first time, truly free, and his choices become truly moral.

From a Marxian perspective, Rambert's overcoming of his alienation in order to achieve his human potential can only be possible within the context of revolution. But perhaps it is Rambert's very acceptance of his situation, not in the sense of resignation, but in the light of his consequent decision to help in the resistance to the plague that can be defined as a revolution in itself. There is a great difference between a fatalistic bowing of the head to the blind workings of fate, and accepting, without illusion, the reality of one's true nature and situation, so as to use this as a grounding for a free decision to fight against any form of plague which attempts to destroy freedom. We have seen how, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus shows how it is the 'lucidity' with which Sisyphus contemplates his fate which is the basis of his resistance (MOS 109); we might say, therefore, that the root of revolution must always lie in the clear self-awareness of the individual.

In *Brighton Rock,* the apparent manifestation of resistance to evil is that of Ida Arnold when she refuses to allow the murder of Hale to go unpunished. It cannot be

denied that she is resisting evil in the person of Pinkie, and that Pinkie can be described as an evil person with evil intentions, but perhaps her resistance is flawed: although she begins from what we might see as a legitimate feeling of outrage on behalf of Fred Hale, she very quickly seems to lose sight of this. Soon, all that matters for her is the 'thrill of the chase', which seems to be the only way in which she can inject some excitement into her 'sad and dissatisfied' life.

It might be a rather harsh judgement to make, but it seems that her resistance is ultimately selfish and therefore self-defeating in character, and so is ultimately futile in that it leaves untouched the likes of Colleoni and the rest of those involved in institutionalised corruption. Judith Adamson suggests that 'Pinkie's situation in Brighton is a resonant metaphor for the position of the individual embattled and degraded in pre-war England ... the forces of barbarity have taken over entirely.'[16] Ida cannot engage in effective resistance because she runs from the 'lucidity' which Sisyphus seeks; she does not seem to have any conscious awareness of or interest in these 'forces of barbarity',

When Rambert is trying to arrange his escape from Oran, he too seems to initially lose sight of his goal. He becomes lost in the details of the various assignations which he is drawn to make with members of the underworld, so that, after coming up against yet another abortive attempt at escape:

> It was at this moment ... that it suddenly struck him ... that all this time he'd practically forgotten the woman he loved, so absorbed had he been in trying to find a rift in the walls that cut him off from her. But... now that once more all ways of escape were sealed against him, he felt his longing for her blaze up again ... racing like wildfire in his blood (Pl 130).

As we have seen, Rambert is able to transcend this trap of inauthenticity, this submerging of his self-awareness in the recurring banality of the details of life. But

Ida is never able to achieve this. Her initial concern for justice, like that of so many of her contemporaries, becomes an illusion. Fred Hale is the nominal focus for her quest for 'what's right', but the shallow nature of her commitment is revealed when we read: 'Poor old Fred – the name no longer conveyed any sense of grief or pathos. She couldn't remember anything much about him now ... The hunt was what mattered' (BR p151). It seems that Ida will never experience a 'longing' for Hale – or for any man in her life – that will 'blaze up... like wildfire in [her] blood,' she will always remain a stranger to such feelings, excluded from the community of those whose emotions are engaged by the reality of the existence of others.

Pinkie's resistance is against the outside world which, he believes, is constantly trying to undermine him; it seems that, no matter what he does or who he murders, there is always another way in which he is being threatened. He has killed Spicer, exiled Cubitt, married Rose and sent Prewitt abroad, all to protect himself from the consequences of his murder of Hale. However, despite all his efforts, yet another potential danger appears: just after his marriage to Rose, he realises that he has been seen by the 'spotty girl' whom Hale had desperately tried to pick up as a protective witness when he was being pursued by Pinkie's gang: 'Now she watched him, nudged her pasty girl friend, spoke of him, told he didn't know what lies. Christ! he thought, had he got to massacre a world?' (BR p175).* As we have seen, it is this 'world' which Pinkie sees as his enemy, whether personified in the threat from the 'spotty girl', or represented by the establishment which allows Colleoni to prosper. Adamson

* There seem to be interesting echoes of Macbeth here, cf. III,iv,135-7: 'I am in blood / Steep'd in so far, that should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er.' Graham Smith makes similar observations on pp63-4, and some further references to Macbeth on pp 99-101. Also, we may compare the way Macbeth had his one time friend, Banquo, murdered by hired assassins, then to see his ghost return and take Macbeth's own chair at a banquet at the palace, with the way that Pinkie arranged for Spicer, his one time faithful lieutenant, to be murdered by members of Colleoni's gang, only to find him alive and back at 'Frank's', although, for a moment, Pinkie fears that it may be a supernatural manifestation.

sees this as a political battle, suggesting that Greene is 'using the thriller inventively as a metaphor for the menace and anxiety he found in the war between the individual and the forces of monopoly capitalism.'[17] Couto describes Pinkie as 'the teenage criminal who struggles to fight the world that exploits him',[18] and it does seem that Pinkie is being punished, not for his evil, but for his potential ability to disrupt the smooth running of society. The police inspector makes this clear when he warns the Boy not to cause problems by going against Colleoni, who masks his violent evil with an acceptable face of capitalism (to misquote a later British prime minister). It seems that Pinkie has something in common with Meursault here, in the sense that each is being punished for their refusal to conform rather than for their real crimes. Couto continues by pointing to 'Pinkie's underprivileged childhood' and suggesting that 'Pinkie's situation comes alive with the cry of pain and despair, anger and violent revolt.'[19] But Pinkie's revolt is not like the revolution of Marx, or Kierkegaard's search for self-realisation, it is a rejection, not just of the values of society, but of the values of all humanity. We see this rejection in the way that his greatest pleasure seems to be the infliction of pain on another human being, and how his greatest wish is for 'No more human contacts, other people's emotions washing at the brain – he would be free again: [and after Rose's suicide] nothing to think about but himself' (BR p231). For Terry Eagleton:

> The evil of Pinkie ... lies in his uncompromisingly total rejection of ordinary human reality: of the texture of human experience itself. His evil is closely linked with his social and sexual ignorance: he embodies a kind of pure negation, an 'annihilating eternity'.[20]

In Pinkie's failure as a rebel, Greene clearly shows us that successful resistance is basically incompatible with a state of alienation from social or human values.

An important question to ask here would seem to be: are the Pinkies of this world really free to choose any destiny for themselves other than that of a low-grade criminal, unable to engage with or even really imagine the reality of the existence of others? Were Kenneth Allot and Miriam Farris correct when they wrote that 'A terror of life, a terror of what experience can do to the individual, a terror at predetermined corruption, is the motive force that drives Greene as a novelist.'[21]

If we look again at the character of Raven in *A Gun for Sale,* we see a similar situation to that of Pinkie, in that his terrible childhood has blighted the development of his imagination. His father has been executed for murder, and Raven subsequently discovered his mother's body lying on the kitchen table after she had committed suicide by cutting her throat. The remainder of his childhood is spent in an austere and loveless children's home, so that, on leaving to find his own way in life, he has to confront a world of human experience which he cannot share, amid people whose lives have been so different to his that they have no means of understanding him. To emphasise this alienation even more, Greene has seen fit to give Raven a hare-lip, so that no female relationship will ever mitigate his isolation: 'Raven had never had a girl. The hare-lip prevented that. He had learnt, when he was very young, how repulsive it was' (GFS 5). He becomes a criminal, and is eventually contracted to murder an elderly continental politician of whom he knows very little and cares even less. After the murder, he is betrayed to the police by the very people who contracted him. He is, in fact, being used as a pawn by Sir Marcus, the unscrupulous head of Midland Steel, whose intention is to start a European war in order to boost the fortunes of his flagging armaments industry; again we have the exploitation of a socially excluded individual by the capitalist establishment. Raven realises that he has

been deceived, and it seems that the only way of fighting back is to seek revenge. Greene later wrote of Raven and Pinkie:

> They have something of a fallen angel about them, a morality which once belonged to another place. The outlaw of justice always keeps in his heart the sense of justice outraged – *his* crimes have an excuse and yet he is pursued by the Others ... who wear the masks of success.[22]

This feeling of outrage is fed by the realisation that it is actually the measure of success as criminals enjoyed by the likes of Sir Marcus or Colleoni that really sets them apart from the Ravens and the Pinkies; a success by virtue of which these 'Others' enjoy the protection of a society on which they are capable of inflicting far greater damage than the third rate villains ever could. Just as Camus' rebellion requires a rebel who feels he is 'justified', it is the 'sense of justice outraged' that drives the misdirected and alienation inducing rebellion of Pinkie and Raven.

It seems almost inevitable that anyone in this situation will fall into the error of equating humanity itself with the mores of modern capitalist society. By rebelling against society, therefore, they also rebel against human nature and the need for self-realisation, which is seen in terms either of the bourgeois who control the 'cash registers and policemen and prostitutes [and] Parliament' (BR 65), or else those condemned to the poverty and degradation of 'Nelson Place' or the loveless abuse of a children's home. It is almost as if society has deliberately conspired against them, by forcing them to reject and rebel against the only thing that can save them from their social deprivation: their realisation of themselves as unique, existing human beings in the presence of others. This cruel distortion of their imagination has made of them social cripples, unable to resist the 'forces of barbarity' which surround them. Couto suggests that very often in Greene's work, the existential struggle of the individual:

> 'is dramatised as confrontation. The law-abiding class ... is often set against the law-breaker, the social outcast and the political activist. The custodians subject themselves to unconditional authority of State or Church. The rebel lives under the threat of death or extinction.'[23]

The freedom of the 'law-breaker' or 'social outcast' is manipulated or removed altogether by the 'custodians', who are themselves apparently trading their own freedom in order to absolve themselves of the responsibility for their own actions, by an inauthentic sacrifice of their humanity to the 'State or Church'. The unscrupulous businessman is therefore able to say, when for example he pollutes African rivers with crude oil, or is instrumental in causing violence and social unrest,* that he is doing nothing *illegal*, and that, anyway, his responsibility is to his shareholders, not to some remote African township. It must be very difficult indeed for the successful executive of a company which is profiting from the exploitation of poor nations, to change his profit-motivated existence in order to think in terms of the well-being of others, and to begin to live in a truly authentic way. We may wonder, therefore, whether such a person is just as trapped within his own existential prison of 'despair' (in the Kierkegaardian sense), and just as far away from self-realisation as are the socially excluded Pinkies and Ravens.

We have still not answered the question regarding the possibility of Pinkie's having sufficient freedom to choose his own destiny, but perhaps Greene does not really seek to resolve this. Perhaps questions concerning the idea of 'predetermined corruption' are unavoidable and yet unanswerable. For Greene, (and also, it seems, for Kant – see

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* Shell, along with several other multinational oil companies has been (and continues to be) involved in extremely controversial activities in Nigeria. John Vidal wrote in the Guardian, September 22, 1999: 'The Niger delta ... faces a new crisis. Violence has flared against Shell and other Western oil companies, which extract oil worth an estimated $150bn a year from below the villages of some of the world's poorest people. The oil companies, rights activists and environmental organisations report a rapidly disintegrating society plagued by summary executions, shootouts, inter-ethnic violence, pollution, riots, occupations of oil facilities and demonstrations.' The oil companies, meanwhile, manage to maintain their profit margins.

above p152) this does not mean that it is therefore useless to ask such questions, but that an acceptance of the limits of human reason can give us some form of freedom to transcend these very limits. We can say nothing of what lies beyond rational knowledge until we admit that there *is* something which lies outside 'reason's every ability'.[24] Once we admit the existence of such a realm, (which Kant referred to as the 'Noumenal'), we are free to concentrate on what *does* lie within our power: the formulation of authentic questions which, by their very nature as questions, help us towards a confrontation with ourselves. This can lead to the framing of yet more questions which seem to be the only guides which we have as we grope, almost blindly it seems, toward a knowledge of what it means to exist as a free human being. The novelist and ex QC, John Mortimer, commenting on the moral dilemma in his novel, *Dunster,* says something that might be relevant to the positions of Greene and Camus: 'I didn't provide an answer to this dilemma; it is the purpose of the novelist, as it is of the defending barrister, to go on asking awkward questions.'[25] Perhaps we could argue that part of the genius of a great novelist lies in this ability to ask disturbing and awkward questions, which prompt us to examine our lives more closely.

We have seen that the resistance of 'social cripples' like Pinkie was directed against the values, not only of society, but of humanity itself. By contrast, Raymond Rambert found the true reality of his own existence in the lucid confrontation with the presence of others, especially in the nature of their suffering. For Pinkie and Raven, there could be no significance in the suffering of others, a suffering which they themselves were instrumental in perpetrating. In this way, they were destroying the very conditions which could lead them to some sort of self-realisation; we might say

that their acts of apparent resistance were self-defeating, which is to say that they were really directed against themselves.

Rose's resistance may be seen in direct contrast to that of Pinkie's in the way that she freely and lucidly chooses to defy the society in which she lives by giving her loyalty to Pinkie, knowing and accepting him as he really is (or, at least, as she sincerely believes he is), yet on condition that he accepts *her* as *she* really is. This is evident in the way that Rose shows one of her rare moments of anger, not when Pinkie is abusing her or trying to frighten her, but when he comes close to undermining her as a real person. Pinkie takes Rose on a bus trip to 'the country' (practically a foreign land for the Boy), and is unable to hide his contempt and distaste for her appearance; Greene juxtaposes a fleeting glimpse from the bus window of a Roedean girl 'with a hockey stick staring at something in the sky, with cropped expensive turf all around her' (BR 88). The 'something in the sky' at which the girl is staring seems to suggest wider vistas and greater opportunities than are available to Pinkie and Rose, who are cut off from her and her kind by the uncrossable gulf of 'expensive turf'. Rose finally loses her temper and tells Pinkie that 'If I don't suit you ... you can leave me alone.' She seems to sense that Pinkie has just been mentally comparing, with some bitterness, the situation of the privileged classes with their own common background of Nelson place, which he seems unable to escape because of his involvement with her; she warns him, 'If I'm not grand enough ... I've seen you looking at me. My hat...' (BR 92). As Camus might have commented, 'So far but no further.'[26]

As we have seen, it may be that Rose is the only character in *Brighton Rock* who actually lives an existentially 'authentic', which is to say free, existence. Unlike

Pinkie's ineffectual and selfish resistance to the life around him, Rose decides to resist in her way by a selfless sacrifice of what must be seen to be, for a Catholic, the greatest treasure of all: her immortal soul. When cornered and confronted by Ida Arnold, she stands up to the older woman bravely and authentically; she is not prepared to give away any part of herself. She knows that Pinkie is evil, and soon realises that he is a murderer, but she has made her decision and intends to stand by it. Ida is talking about right and wrong, or rather her personal and convenient ideas of right and wrong which seem so shallow to Rose, who is seeing things from the 'depths of her fidelity' (BR 199). Even when Pinkie is driving her out to the country to fulfil their bogus suicide pact, she still remains faithful, even though she is about to perform 'the worst act of all, the act of despair, the sin without forgiveness' at his instigation. (BR p228) It remains her choice, and is the form of her defiant resistance both to this world and the next:

> He was going to damn himself but she was going to show them that they couldn't damn him without damning her too. There was nothing he could do, she wouldn't do (BR 228). (see also note p105)

Of course, Rose's stand can achieve no tangible goal in the sense that no oppressor will be defeated, neither will Pinkie be turned away from his criminal actions; there will be no victory except that of the exercise of her own personal freedom of choice, irrespective of the consequences, which is nevertheless a valid and important human achievement. Greene seems to see in this kind of defiance, in which personal consequences are ignored, the true ability of the human to achieve a measure of individual freedom. An example of such defiance may be seen in the self-sacrificing idealism of Kim Philby – the Englishman who spied for the Soviets and who was

eventually forced out of England to live a life of exile in Russia. He had been a friend of Greene's, who said of him in an interview with Mario Couto, circa 1988, that:

> I think Philby genuinely believed in Communism ... I did admire him - he did his job [for the British secret Service] extremely well ... he was recruited by the Communists at the time of the Hunger Marches and I'm sure he didn't commit treason for money. He lived out his belief and I admire him for that.[27]

Couto, commenting on Greene's loyalty to Philby, writes that:

> The two friends have maintained contact over the years. Personal friendship for Greene, and for Greene's England, is the supreme ethic ... for Greene individual loyalties matter, and particularly so when he can imaginatively sympathise with the idealism that prompts a certain course of action.[28]

We can see, therefore, the value which Greene places on the idealistic stance of Rose. She has made her choice in Pinkie, and she will stick to it to the end, defying the whole world, including the Catholic Church, if she has to. In a similar vein, when Philby was asked to explain his attitude to Stalinism,[29] he quoted some lines from Greene's novel, *The Confidential Agent*:*

> *[Part of the dialogue between the characters 'D' and 'Rose Cullen'.]*
> He said 'You've got to choose some line of action and live by it ... It's no good taking a moral line. My people commit atrocities like others.'
> 'Do you believe,' she said, 'that your leaders are any better...?'
> 'No ... but I still prefer the people they lead ...'
> 'The poor right or wrong', she scoffed.
> 'It's no worse – is it? than my country right or wrong. You choose your side once and for all.'[30]

Are we able to see Rose's resistance as successful? It does seem that we can, at least from the point of view that she has chosen for her goal something which it is actually possible for her to achieve and which she does achieve: faithfulness to Pinkie based on her love for him. It is also apparent that, unlike Pinkie and despite her deprived upbringing, she has somehow managed to develop sufficient imagination

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* Camus had also read *The Confidential Agent*, and had apparently been sufficiently impressed to have recorded some passages (not including the passage quoted by Philby) in his notebooks. (*Notebook VI*, p195)

and empathy for others, to be *able* to love unselfishly. In this we may be reminded of Dr Rieux in *The Plague*, for whom it seems that those who achieve their goals do so 'because they had asked for the one thing that depended on them solely ... those whose desires are limited to man and his humble yet formidable love...' (Pl 244).

I have suggested that Rose is successful in two ways, (which really amount to the same thing): she has acted autonomously in choosing to be faithful to Pinkie as he really is, and she has actually achieved this goal of fidelity through personal courage and endurance. However, if the goal of a particular act of resistance is exclusively concerned with what Sartre would call 'concrete ends' – perhaps an individual attempts to instigate a revolt against an oppressive regime – then, no matter how justified or well executed the rebellion may be, success is, of course, by no means guaranteed. Yet this is true only if we equate success solely in terms of the overthrow of the regime. Let us examine Camus' example of 'A slave who has taken orders all his life [and who] suddenly decides that he cannot obey some new command.'[31] Camus goes on to suggest that, in saying 'no', the rebel slave has 'put self-respect above everything else and proclaims that it is preferable to life itself.'[32] The slave may well be punished for his resistance, perhaps even executed; an example of a failed rebellion we might say. Yet, even in this extreme case, we see that the resistance of the slave has really achieved its goal, a goal which can be defined as the free, autonomous act of an individual who has come to see that, without such an act, his very existence as a human being would be meaningless. At the time of writing *The Plague*, we have seen that Camus had been moving away from his notion of The Absurd, toward the idea of Rebellion as a basis for moral action. The above example

of the rebel slave who is prepared to face the consequence of his act seems to be reflected in a later entry in his notebooks:

> I. The Myth of Sisyphus (absurd) – II. The Myth of Prometheus (revolt) - III. The Myth of Nemesis.[33]

Camus does not clarify this rather cryptic entry, but perhaps we may be allowed to guess that, after his Promethean revolt against the 'Absurd' condition of slavery, the slave must expect the retribution of Nemesis: 'people who rise above their condition expose themselves to reprisals from the gods since they risk overthrowing the order of the world and must be punished.'[34] For obvious reasons, this is an idea much approved of by those in a position of power over other men or women, from classical to modern times, but it holds weight only if, as I suggested earlier, the object of the revolt is exclusively concerned with some 'concrete end.' However, if the true object of resistance is a courageous demand for recognition as an autonomous individual, then we can see that it is in the very *act* of resistance that freedom is to be found. In this way, resistance becomes synonymous with freedom and an end in itself; its success is founded on the moral resources of the individual, and as a result of this, cannot be undermined by external contingencies.

Camus was struggling with the idea that rebellion so often seemed to lead to violence and murder, which necessarily denies the freedom of other individuals. After man has come to recognise that the achievement of his potential is conditional on his acceptance of intersubjectivity, then he must also see that violence against others necessarily undermines his own freedom: 'He rebelled in the name of the identity of man with man and he sacrifices this identity by consecrating the difference in blood

... his only existence, in the midst of suffering and oppression, was contained in this identity.'[35] The violent rebel will often attempt to justify the imprisonment or execution of his enemies by an appeal to some great future to which he aspires; perhaps he holds to the illusion that his violence is a necessary means of achieving something like 'the future happiness of mankind' or some similar phrase. But, as Jean Tarrou had realised, the rebel who kills as a means to his end elevates the achievement of an external aim into a false idea of freedom; he defeats himself by losing sight of his real goal of self-affirmation. An appeal to the future will not alter this: a resort to violence is the destruction of the 'other' and is, therefore, the annihilation of the self which can only exist in the presence of the 'other'. Camus saw this quite clearly:

> The rebels, who have decided to gain their ends through violence and murder, have in vain replaced, in order to preserve the hope of existing, the 'we are' by a 'we shall be'.[36]

The goal of freedom in the future cannot logically be achieved by an act of resistance which involves murder in the present; if one cancels out the other, then neither can be said to exist.

This does not mean, however, that violent resistance such as that of the French to the Nazi invader is morally wrong. It is the *origin* of the violence and oppression which is the significant point here, which is obviously, in this case, in the German attempt to subdue the French people; it is the invader who is here denying 'the identity of man with man.' After the war, Camus was concerned that his countrymen shouldn't resort to violent revenge, in particular that collaborators were not to be

subjected to the death penalty (although he was not entirely consistent in this*). He signed petitions for pardon on behalf of several condemned men; his attitude is perhaps best summed up in a letter which he wrote on behalf of Lucien Rebatet, the 'fascist author of *The Debris*':

> "I am asked to asked to add my signature to a request for pardon ... I fought until the end the man that he was ... but it is a stronger motive that impels me today to ask that the condemned man be spared. Whatever one may say or think, no country in the world can do without pity.'[38]

I have claimed that moral freedom is grounded in the resistance of an individual to oppression, either alone or as part of a community. But when resistance succeeds and then resorts to revenge and murder under the guise of justice, it becomes the very oppression which it sought to oppose, and a denial of the freedom which it sought to achieve.

An important question which should be addressed at this point is, 'what resources do we need in order to achieve freedom through rebellion?' I suggest that what we need above all is imagination, or, to be more specific, the 'moral imagination' which Martha Nussbaum feels is essential in our attempt to 'live well' (see above p9). To help illustrate what I mean, I would like to recount a short anecdote from my personal experience.

About twenty five years ago, I had a certain amount of contact with a family consisting of mother, father, son and daughter, who lived in a block of council flats in South Wales. The father turned out to be a burglar, but worse than this, it was eventually discovered that he would regularly take his five year old son (let us call

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* In 1944, Camus seems to have himself held ideas of revenge which he later repudiated. In an article for *Combat* he wrote that, when confronted by traitors, 'justice should make mercy shut up.' Todd tells us that, 'When French Nazi collaborators like Geoges Suarez and Paul Chack were executed, Camus ... did not regret it.'[37]

him David) with him on his burglaries because the lad was useful in getting in through small openings such as kitchen windows etc. We may be reminded of a modern day Bill Sykes. David was brought up to regard burglary and other illegal acts as normal behaviour, so that no-one was surprised when he eventually took to crime in his own right, as it were. He has now served several years in prison for drug dealing and crimes of extreme violence, and, from what I hear, shows no signs of changing his ways.

David has, like Pinkie Brown or Raven, fallen into a sort of rebelion against a society which he sees as alien; but his rebellion, like theirs, is self-defeating, leading only to the misery of crime and imprisonment. The problem seems to be that David just can't *imagine* any way of life other than that of a criminal; it is what he has been brought up to regard as natural. Just like Pinkie, his 'imagination hadn't awoken,' so that he has no moral resources to draw on which might help him. Greene sees this lack of imagination in Pinkie as crucial; it is what separates him from others and therefore prevents any real development of the self. When he inflicts pain on his victims, he can see their agony, even enjoy their agony, but he cannot *feel* their agony. Surely, no-one who can genuinely feel the agony of another would be *able* to inflict pain on them; it would be equivalent to inflicting it on themselves. The sadist is inevitably trapped within a solipsistic world in which his imagination, such as it is, cannot pass beyond the ego of the self.

For Sartre, we are all free to create ourselves and must assume full responsibility for all our actions. But don't we need a measure of imagination in order to achieve this? and what about those who have been psychologically damaged, especially in

childhood, so that their imagination has not been able to develop? The psychologist Abraham Maslow suggests that:

> Sartre and others speak of the "self as a project," which is wholly created by the continued (and arbitrary) choices of the person himself, almost as if he could make himself into anything he decided to be ... this is ... just plain silly.[39]

Maslow goes on to suggest a broadly Kierkegaardian perspective by considering the ideas of those who 'talk of *discovering* the self', yet against a real background of 'such forces ... as poverty, exploitation, nationalism, war and social structure.'[40] Heidegger described this as the 'facticity' of our lives, the undeniable reality in which we find ourselves, and Camus had come to see that the nihilism inherent in the concept of the absurd defines it as an impoverished response to such 'forces'. An authentic and meaningful rebellion against oppression must be grounded in a lucid and positive engagement with reality which transcends the absurd. This is the engagement of Dr Rieux, who pushes aside metaphysical speculation to 'concentrate on fighting against creation as he found it': 'there are sick people who need curing ... I defend them as best I can. That's all' (Pl 107). But there must first exist a self which we can discover; a self which is able to imagine, not only the concept of rebellion, but the presence of other living human beings. Camus made it clear that he did not regard rebellion as an 'egoistic act', but that 'revolt ... can also break out at the mere spectacle of oppression of which someone else is the victim. In such cases there is a feeling of identification with other individuals' (Reb 23).

But how is this possible? How can the authentic individual who has lucidly confronted his 'aloneness' then go on to identify or empathise with another? Mazlow writes:

> The existential stress on the ultimate aloneness of the individual ... makes more problematic and more fascinating the mystery of communication between alone-

> nesses via, e.g., intuition and empathy, love and altruism, identification with others ... We take these for granted. It would be better if we regarded them as miracles to be explained.[41]

Neither Greene nor Camus attempt to explain this 'miracle', nor whether it is even possible for what we might call psychologically damaged or underdeveloped characters such as Meursault, Cottard or Pinkie, or the real-life David, ever to achieve such communication with others. But both writers have attempted to describe the moral situation of real human beings in such a way as to demand that we engage imaginatively with the texts. I suggest that such an engagement of the imagination by the members of a given society is essential if any individuals within that society, especially disadvantaged individuals, are to be recognised as real human beings to whom we may, perhaps, be able to offer some sort of help or understanding. Susan Tarrow writes (she is referring to Camus, but could equally well be commenting on Greene):

> ... his vision of the trends in society, of the triumph of violence over dialogue, of the state over the individual, is now generally recognised as a relevant indictment of the modern world.[42]

If either Greene or Camus have stirred our imaginations with regard to such issues, and especially with regard to the human beings with whom we share our world, then we might say that Martha Nussbaum would be correct to assert that both *Brighton Rock* and *The Plague* are truly 'moral achievements.'

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